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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Shah orders free movement in Manipur from 8 March

He chaired a high-level meet to review the security in state

The directive came during a high-level security review meeting, the first since President's rule was imposed in the state on 13 February *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW DELHI, 1 MARCH

- The order bears significance as travel through the areas inhabited by Imphal valley-based Meiteis and neighbouring hills based Kukis was prohibited since ethnic violence broke out in 2023.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday directed security forces to ensure free movement on all routes in Manipur from 8 March, and called for strict action against those obstructing the roads.

The directive came during a high-level security review meeting, the first since President's rule was imposed in the state on 13 February, following ethnic violence that has claimed over 250 lives since May 2023.Shah reaffirmed the Centre's commitment to restoring lasting peace in the region and providing necessary assistance to achieve this. He also emphasized the importance of completing the fencing work along Manipur's international border at the earliest.

The Home Minister reviewed the overall law and order situation in the state and directed that all efforts be made to dismantle the entire drug trade network in the region, as part of a broader effort to make Manipur drug-free. He also instructed that all routes in Manipur be kept clear for the free movement of people, starting from 8 March. Strict action will be taken against those who attempt to block roads. The meeting was attended by key officials, including Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan, Director of the Intelligence Bureau Tapan Deka, and military leadership. The security review comes after the 20 February deadline given by the Governor for the surrender of illegal and looted arms, a move prompted by the violence that began with a 'Tribal Solidarity March' in May 2023. More than 300 weapons, including 246 firearms from the Meitei radical group Arambai Tenggol, have been surrendered during the seven-day period.

Bhalla, who extended the deadline to 6 March following public demands, has been actively engaging with communities in the state to restore normalcy. The ongoing ethnic violence in Manipur started with protests against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status and has led to widespread unrest. *—PTI*

NO HUMAN CASES SO FAR

2,000 birds die in 3 K'taka districts amid H5N1 flu concerns

BALLARI, 1 MARCH

PHOTO: ANI

- Authorities culled 292 poultry birds in Chikkaballapur and 1,020 in Ballari.

Karnataka has stepped up measures to combat an avian flu outbreak, with mass culling of poultry and heightened surveillance across three affected districts—Ballari, Raichur, and Chikkaballapur—following confirmed cases of H5N1. No human cases have been reported so far.

The outbreak was first detected in Manvi taluk of Raichur, Sandur taluk in Ballari, and Chikkaballapur taluk. In Ballari, nearly 2,000 birds at a poultry farm in Karekop village died, while in Raichur, 30 birds succumbed to the virus. A laboratory in Bhopal confirmed H5N1 as the cause of death.

In response, authorities have initiated culling operations, with 292 poultry birds culled in Chikkaballapur and 1,020 in Ballari. Eggs from these sites were also destroyed. Culling teams are equipped with protective gear, including masks, gloves, and goggles. Rapid response teams have been set up to monitor the situation, and an area within a 3-kilometre radius of the infected farms has been declared an "Infected Area."

To prevent the spread, poultry markets within a 10km radius have been closed, and all poultry products, including eggs and waste materials, have been destroyed. Prophylactic medication has been administered to individuals who were in close contact with the farms, and they are being monitored for flu-like symptoms.

Authorities are closely monitoring the situation at state borders with Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, where the outbreak originated. While the situation is being managed, public health officials urge people not to panic, assuring that all necessary precautions are being taken. *—Salar News*

DKS chides Kannada film fraternity over Mekedatu Padayatra

DEHRADUN, 1 MARCH

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said he was upset with the Kannada film industry for not supporting the Mekedatu Padayatra in 2022. He was speaking at the 16th Bengaluru International Film Festival at Vidhana Soudha,.

He added that only one person from the industry, Sadu Kokila, attended the event. "I recognised his sincerity and appointed him as the chairman of the Karnataka Chalanachitra Academy," Shivakumar said. The festival, which began on Saturday, will screen films at 15 venues, including Orion Mall, and Kalavidara Sangha. *—Salar News*

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BJP boycotts Stalin's meet on delimitation

NEW DELHI, 1 MARCH

Tamil Nadu BJP president K Annamalai on Saturday said his party would not take part in the March 5 all-party meeting on the delimitation exercise and blamed Chief Minister M K Stalin for attempting to spread "imaginary fears" over the matter. Writing to Stalin, Annamalai said his party firmly believed that he has misconstrued the delimitation exercise and has convened the all party meeting to "spread your imaginary fears and deliberately lie about it," even before any official statement was made. *—PTI*

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Bhagavan BC appointed VC of RGUHS

BENGALURU, 1 MARCH

Bhagavan BC, Principal and Professor of General Surgery at Kempegowda Institute of Medical Sciences (KIMS), Bengaluru, has been appointed as the new Vice-Chancellor of Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences (RGUHS), Bengaluru. The appointment, made by Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot, was announced on Saturday. Bhagavan will serve a three-year term, effective from the date he assumes office, or until he turns 65, or until further orders are issued—whichever occurs first. The decision follows the recommendations of a Search Committee formed under the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences Act, 1994. The committee's panel of candidates was forwarded to the Governor, who also serves as the Chancellor, for final approval. His appointment marks the end of MK Ramesh's tenure. *—Salar News*

Zelenskyy thanks US after being bullied

LONDON, 1 MARCH

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy expressed gratitude to the US for its continued support in the war against Russia, following a tense meeting with US President Donald Trump at the White House. Despite the combative tone during their encounter, Zelenskyy emphasised that US backing remained crucial for Ukraine's fight and voiced his hope for strong relations moving forward.

Taking to X on Saturday, Zelenskyy thanked the American people, Congress, and President Trump for their bipartisan support, describing the bond between Ukraine and the US as "historic and solid." He underscored that the US had been instrumental in aiding Ukraine, with his country deeply appreciative of this help.

The meeting with Trump, which saw a dramatic blowout, left many uncertain about the future of US-Ukraine relations. Ukraine had hoped to sign a minerals agreement, but the meeting ended without a deal, dashing expectations. Zelenskyy's comments signalled a desire for continued collaboration despite the diplomatic friction.

On Saturday, Zelenskyy arrived in London, ahead of schedule, for a summit organised by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer. The summit, taking place on Sunday, will include leaders from across Europe, including France, Germany, Italy, and Poland, as well as NATO's Secretary-General and the Presidents of the European Commission and Council. The focus will be on ending the three-year conflict with Russia and ensuring regional security.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan also spoke to Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov on the Ukraine war, continuing efforts to mediate peace talks. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 5 & 6

No fuel for vehicles older than 15 yrs in Delhi after 31 March

NEW DELHI, 1 MARCH

The Delhi government will stop providing petrol to vehicles older than 15 years at fuel stations across the city after 31 March, Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa announced on Saturday.

Following a meeting with officials to discuss measures to combat air pollution in the national capital, Sirsa said the government is taking stringent steps to curb vehicular emissions and pollution.

The meeting focused on key policy decisions, including restrictions on older vehicles, mandatory anti-smog measures, and the transition to electric public transport.

"We are installing gadgets at petrol pumps which will identify vehicles older than 15 years, and no fuel will be provided to them," Sirsa said after the meeting. Sirsa announced that all high-rise buildings, hotels, and commercial complexes in the capital must install anti-smog guns to curb air pollution levels. Furthermore, he said nearly 90 per cent of the public CNG buses in Delhi will be phased out by December 2025 and replaced by electric buses. *—PTI*

RAMADAN IS HERE

People purchase perfumes and caps on the eve of Ramadan in Frazer Town, Bengaluru, on Saturday. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Muslims fast during Ramadan to practice self-discipline and empathise with those less fortunate. Fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

5 pilgrims killed in Kollegal crash

MYSURU, 1 MARCH

Five people, including two women, were killed on the spot when the car they were travelling in collided head-on with a truck near Chikkunduvadi village in Kollegal taluk on Saturday. The victims were en route Male Mahadeshwara (MM) Hills. According to the police, the deceased are Lakshmi, 21, and Likitha, 22, from Mysuru, and Suhas, 23, Shreyas, 21, and Nithin, 22, from Mandya district.

Due to the impact of the collision, both the car and the truck overturned and rolled into roadside agricultural fields. The tipper truck driver sustained minor injuries and had a narrow escape. Police said the accident occurred when the car, heading towards MM Hills for the Shivaratri Jathra Mahotsav Darshan, attempted to overtake another vehicle. The bodies were shifted to Kollegal Town General Hospital and later handed over to the relatives after postmortem. *—Salar News*

IN DEVANAHALLI

Thieves use gas cutter to open ATM, loot ₹30L

BENGALURU, 1 MARCH

CCTV footage reveals the criminal spraying paint on the camera to conceal their identity *PHOTO: SALAR*

- Following the robbery, officials from SBI, along with local police, including senior officers, inspected the site. Bengaluru Rural SP CK Baba visited the location to review the investigation, and forensic teams were deployed to gather fingerprints and other evidence.

In a ATM heist, unidentified criminals stole Rs 30 lakh from a State Bank of India (SBI) ATM in Sulibele village, near Devanahalli Cross, Bengaluru Rural, during the early hours of Saturday.

The incident occurred around 3.30am when a group of miscreants, travelling in a vehicle with an Andhra Pradesh registration number, used a gas cutter to break into the ATM machine and make off with the cash. CCTV footage revealed their method, though the gang had attempted to obscure their identities by spraying paint on the cameras.

Several nearby residents were awakened by the noise from the cutting tools, but by the time they arrived at the scene, the thieves had already fled.

Following the robbery, officials from SBI, along with local police, including senior officers, inspected the site. Bengaluru Rural SP CK Baba visited the location to review the investigation, and forensic teams were deployed to gather fingerprints and other evidence. The culprits are believed to have escaped via the Hoskote route, and a case has been registered at Sulibele Police Station.

Despite a spate of similar robberies in recent months, including incidents in Mangaluru and Bidar, little has been done to enhance security measures. *—Salar News*

INDIA'S 1ST TRANSGENDER CLINICS SHUT AFTER USAID FUND FREEZE

HYDERABAD, 1 MARCH

India's first three clinics dedicated to the transgender community were forced to shut last month after the Donald Trump administration froze funds for foreign aid projects under the US Agency for International Development (USAID), according to Reuters.

The clinics, part of a collaboration between USAID and Johns Hopkins University, were established in January 2021 under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

The Mitr Clinic, located in Hyderabad, offered essential services to the transgender community, including general health care, hormone therapy guidance, gender-affirming procedures, mental health counselling, and HIV/STI treatment. The closure has impacted nearly 5,000 people who relied on these services. In response to a 90-day pause on foreign aid ordered by President Donald Trump, aimed at reviewing all US-funded projects to align with his "America First" policy, the Mitr clinics were forced to halt operations.

Elon Musk, co-chair of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), reacted to the shutdown, remarking, "That's what American tax dollars were funding." *—Agencies*

Protests erupt over missing youth in Mangaluru

MANGALURU, 1 MARCH

A 19-year-old youth, Diganth, has been missing since February 25 after leaving his home in Amemar village, allegedly to visit a temple. His disappearance has sparked significant public outrage, leading to protests by organisations including the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). Local residents accused the police of inaction and staged a spontaneous shutdown in Farangipete, demanding a comprehensive investigation into the matter. Protesters suggested a link between Diganth's disappearance and local drug cartels. *—PTI*

2 cops suspended over bribery charges in HSR

BENGALURU, 1 MARCH

A Police Sub-Inspector (PSI) and a constable attached to the HSR Layout police station have been suspended over bribery allegations. Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), South East Division, Sarah Fathima issued the suspension orders following an inquiry into the case. According to police sources, PSI Basavaraj and Constable Pujari were found guilty of accepting a bribe of Rs 1 lakh and a laptop in connection with a case registered at the station. After the allegations surfaced, Bengaluru Police Commissioner B. Dayananda directed DCP Sarah Fathima to conduct a detailed investigation and submit a report. Based on her findings, Commissioner Dayananda ordered the suspension of both officers. *—Salar News*

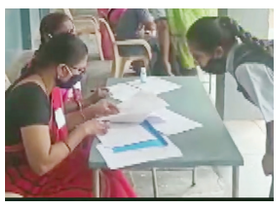


PHOTO: ANI

2L students to take SSLC exams in Kalaburagi division

KALABURAGI, 1 MARCH

The 2024-25 SSLC (Secondary School Leaving Certificate) exams will begin on 21 March, with 2 lakh students registered under the Kalaburagi division of the Department of School Education and Literacy. Covering seven districts of Kalyana Karnataka, the division is focusing on improving results through 20 key measures while ensuring all necessary preparations are in place. The exam will be conducted across 589 centres with Yadgir, Kalaburagi, Raichur, Bidar, Koppal, Ballari, and Vijayanagara witnessing centre additions except for Koppal, which saw a reduction. Among the 1.81 lakh regular students, Kalaburagi has the highest number (42,691), while Yadgir has the lowest (15,883). To ensure transparency, CCTV surveillance will be implemented at all exam centres. The distribution of centres includes 171 in rural areas, 156 at the hobli (cluster) level, 178 at the taluk level, and 84 at the district level. Mandatory 75% attendance rule remains in effect. *—Salar News*

DKS's visit to Sadhguru's event divides Congress

Cooperative Minister says Sadhguru is critical of RaGa

BENGALURU, 1 MARCH

The controversy over Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's visit to Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev's Isha yoga centre in Tamil Nadu for Mahashivaratri celebrations has refused to die down with leaders in the state Congress unit sharply divided over the issue.

Cooperative Minister KN Rajanna questioned the justification behind Shivakumar sharing the stage with those who have been critical of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

"Sadhguru had himself said he does not know Rahul Gandhi. Isn't it? He (Shivakumar) knows better than me what people speak about our leader Rahul Gandhi in the Lok Sabha. Let him answer how justified it is to share stage with such people," Rajanna told media in Hassan.

However, former MP DK Suresh backed his brother, saying Shivakumar has always kept the party informed before attending any event.

Sadhguru had invited DyCM DK Shivakumar personally to attend the event in Coimbatore *PHOTO: X/DKS*

"Whenever Shivakumar met Prime Minister Narendra Modi he informed the party high command. He had even informed the high command about attending Isha Foundation's Maha Shivaratri event," Suresh told reporters here.

Sadhguru had invited Shivakumar personally to attend the event in Coimbatore, which he accepted and attended, he explained.

Shivakumar, who is also the Congress state president, attended the grand function in Coimbatore on Wednesday, where Union Home Minister Amit Shah was also present.

Defending his visit, he had emphasised his deep faith, saying, "I was born Hindu and will die Hindu".

State Public Works Minister Satish Jarkiholi said the party high command should take note of the issue, which has escalated beyond Karnataka and now become a matter of national concern.

Minister MB Patil too defended his visit to Coimbatore, asserting that he did not violate the party policy.

"It is as per the party policy only. Isn't Shivakumar a Hindu? What's there to attend Shivaratri celebrations? Does it violate attending Shivaratri event? Didn't I go to Shiva temple?" Patil asked while speaking to reporters in Vijayapura.

The Minister stressed that Shivakumar is a diehard Congress leader and termed the speculations about his visit to Coimbatore as "media creation".

Addressing concerns over sharing dais with Amit Shah, he asked, "What's wrong in that? Didn't we Congress leaders sit with them (BJP leaders) together?" *—PTI*

Reddy accuses BJP of misinformation on B'luru funds

BENGALURU, 1 MARCH

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy dismissed BJP'S allegations regarding discrimination in fund distribution to BJP constituencies, accusing the party of disseminating misinformation to mask its own shortcomings while in power.

Responding to a recent appeal from a BJP delegation to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Reddy highlighted that during the 2018 administration led by Siddaramaiah, Rs 7,000 crore was allocated to the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), with an additional Rs 1,000 crore provided during the JD(S)-Congress coalition. However, after the BJP ascended to power through 'Operation Kamala', former Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa substantially reduced funding for Congress constituencies by almost 50 per cent.

"In my constituency, the approved allocation of Rs 387 crore was slashed to Rs 152 crore," Reddy stated, rebutting the BJP's claims of providing Rs 8,000 crore annually to the BBMP. "If Rs 32,000 crore was supposedly allocated over four years, where is the evidence? Bengaluru's issues would have been resolved if that money had been effectively utilised," he added.

In a comparative analysis of developmental initiatives by both governments, Reddy credited the Congress for executing projects such as peripheral roads, white-topping, and flyovers. Conversely, he claimed the BJP had mortgaged BBMP assets, impeded major projects, and tarnished the city's image, labelling it a 'garbage city.' He also pointed to the BJP's failure to restore stormwater drains or complete tender-sure projects, leading the High Court to intervene for monitoring pothole repairs. "BBMP commissioners were summoned to court monthly due to mismanagement," he remarked.

Regarding the forthcoming BBMP elections, Reddy indicated they are expected to take place in May, following legislative approval for the restructuring of Greater Bengaluru into two or more municipal entities. *—Salar News*

Mahadevappa orders action on water, fodder for summer

MYSURU, 1 MARCH

District In-Charge Minister HC Mahadevappa convened a meeting on Saturday to urge district officials to implement measures addressing the drinking water crisis and provide fodder for livestock this summer.

During the progress review meeting focused on summer preparedness, held at the Zilla Panchayat auditorium, he instructed officials to identify villages facing severe drinking water shortages and prioritise actions to alleviate their situations.

Despite sufficient rainfall filling all reservoirs in the district, Mahadevappa emphasised the need for precautionary measures to ensure the provision of clean, safe, and uninterrupted drinking water. Deputy Commissioner G Lakshmikanth Reddy reported that Mysuru recorded 965mm of rainfall, exceeding last year's figure of 837mm, which has bolstered both drinking water reservoirs and groundwater levels.

The Zilla Panchayat's rural drinking water supply and sanitation department has highlighted 94 villages experiencing water scarcity this summer. Urban areas are not facing similar issues, with reservoirs projected to meet drinking water needs until the end of May. The Deputy Commissioner instructed rural water supply officials to obtain approval from a local taluk committee for provisions of tanker water to affected villages, insisting that these tankers be equipped with GPS systems.

He also refuted former minister B Sreeramulu's claims of impending political changes, akin to the shifts seen in Maharashtra.

He said that the ruling government, backed by 138 MLAs, remains stable under Siddaramaiah. *—Salar News*

Prohibitory orders imposed around Vidhana Soudha

BENGALURU, 1 MARCH

With the Karnataka Legislature's joint and budget sessions set to commence on 3 March and continue until 21 March, Bengaluru police have imposed prohibitory orders within a 2km radius of Vidhana Soudha to ensure the smooth conduct of legislative proceedings and maintain law and order.

Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda stated that the restrictions, which will remain in force for the entire session, prohibit the gathering of five or more people, processions, protests, and public meetings. Carrying weapons, explosives, or hazardous materials, as well as displaying banners, placards, or distributing pamphlets, has also been banned to prevent potential disturbances. He emphasised that these measures are necessary to uphold public order. *—Salar News*

EXAM RUSH

Students at a PU board exam centre in Bengaluru on Saturday. Around 3,35,468 boys, 3,78,389 girls and 5 transgenders from 5,050 PU colleges are appearing for the examinations *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

B'LURU INT'L FILM FESTIVAL

Violinist L Subramaniam and singer Kavitha Subramaniam perform at the inauguration of the 16th edition of the Bengaluru International Film Festival at Vidhana Soudha on Saturday. The festival will feature over 200 films from 60 countries across 15 venues. This year's theme is 'Universal Peace in Diversity' *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Show support for our water: DKS chides Kannada film fraternity

BENGALURU, 1 MARCH

Urging the Kannada film industry to show commitment to Karnataka's language, water, culture, and land, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar expressed his disappointment over the industry's lack of support for the Mekedatu Padayatra.

Speaking at the inauguration of the 16th Bengaluru International Film Festival on the grand steps of Vidhana Soudha, he said, "I am unhappy and angry that the Kannada film fraternity did not back our fight for Mekedatu. The film industry must stand by the language, water, and culture of this land." He emphasised that the Mekedatu Padayatra was a fight for Bengaluru's drinking water and the State's interests. Despite the challenges posed by Covid-19, he and Siddaramaiah undertook a 150km march, inviting the film industry to join them—but with very few exceptions, no one showed up.

DyCM DK Shivakumar with CM Siddaramaiah at 16 edition of the Bengaluru International Film Festival *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

He also noted how several politicians have tried to enter politics using films as a stepping stone, with some succeeding and others failing. *—Salar News*

LEARN DEVOLUTION OF TAXES: DK SURESH TO CENTRE

BENGALURU, 1 MARCH

The Centre should learn about the proper devolution of taxes to the states before the country "turns against them," said Congress leader and former MP DK Suresh here on Saturday.

He further alleged that BJP wanted north India to take control of the entire nation through delimitation of the Lok Sabha seats.

Suresh called upon the leaders of southern states to set aside their political differences and come together to fight against the Centre's injustice. He also cautioned the Union Government by saying, "It is not good to undermine Karnataka." *—PTI*

MAHASHIVARATRI JATHRA ENDS

Lakhs flock to MM Hills Maha Rathotsava

MYSURU, 1 MARCH

Lakhs of devotees participated in the Maha Rathotsava on Saturday, marking the concluding day of the five-day Shivaratri Jathra festival at the Male Mahadeshwara temple in Hanur taluk, Chamarajanagar district. Various rituals, including Hulivahana and Basava vahana, were performed, alongside special prayers for the utsava murthy, the presiding deity, conducted by 101 girls with traditional Bellada Arathi.

In the early hours, the presiding deity was placed on a chariot adorned with special flowers and leaves in the presence of Salur Mutt pontiff Shanthamallikarjunaswamy. Devotees pulled the chariot around the temple while chanting slogans, offering "Hannu Javana" and bananas to the deity in hopes of having their wishes granted.Cultural programmes featured performances of puja kunitha, veeragase, and Mahadeshwara guddara kunitha, attracting huge crowds from various districts, including Bengaluru, Ramanagara, Mandya, Chikkaballapura, Kolar, Mysuru, and Chamarajanagar, as well as from Tamil Nadu.

To mitigate crowding, KSRTC operated over 500 buses to transport devotees. Mass feeding took place late at night, alongside additional counters for distributing laddus and temple receipts for various rituals.

The district administration ensured extensive arrangements for waste management, drinking water access, accommodation, and other facilities to support the influx of devotees. *—Salar News*

To mitigate crowding, KSRTC operated over 500 buses to transport devotees *PHOTO: SALAR*

Delivery man kills guard over parking dispute

BENGALURU, 1 MARCH

A petty parking dispute escalated into a fatal altercation, resulting in the murder of a security guard by a food delivery executive near Timber Yard, under the jurisdiction of Byatarayanapura Police Station, on Friday evening.

The deceased Ganesh Bahadur Rawal, 30, was employed as a security guard at a garment factory in the area. According to police, the accused, a delivery executive, had visited the factory on Thursday to deliver an order when a heated argument broke out between him and Rawal over parking his two-wheeler. What initially seemed like a minor disagreement took a deadly turn the following day. On Friday after factory employees had left for the day, the delivery executive allegedly returned to the spot, confronted Rawal, and stabbed him in the abdomen before fleeing.

The deceased Ganesh Bahadur Rawal *PHOTO: SALAR*

Local residents found Rawal bleeding profusely and rushed him to a private hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries despite emergency treatment. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: X

Two naxalites killed in Sukma encounter

SUKMA, 1 MARCH

Two Naxalites were killed during an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Saturday morning, according to police reports. The clash occurred in a forest area under the Kistaram police station while a joint team, including personnel from the District Reserve Guard and the CoBRA was conducting an anti-Naxalite operation. This operation was initiated on Friday following intelligence regarding Maoist activity in the region. The bodies of the two Naxalites have been recovered from the encounter site, and a search operation is ongoing. To date, 83 Naxalites have been killed in various encounters across the state this year, with 67 fatalities reported in the Bastar division, which includes Sukma. *—PTI*

CPI(ML) MP highlights delay in allotted house

NEW DELHI, 1 MARCH

Raja Ram Singh, the Lok Sabha floor leader of CPI(ML) Liberation, has raised concerns over not receiving possession of his official residence seven months after it was allocated to him. In a letter to Lok Sabha House Committee Chairman Mahesh Sharma, Singh detailed his frustration regarding the delay in occupying 21, Meena Bagh, Maulana Azad Road, initially allotted to him on August 14, 2024. Singh stated he had made multiple follow-ups with Central Public Works Department officials, yet no timeline for possession has been provided. Previously, he was assigned accommodation on South Avenue, but the occupant, a guest of a BJP MP, could not vacate promptly. Singh, representing Karakat, emphasised that the lack of proper accommodation is hindering his parliamentary duties. *—PTI*

No need for shadow cabinet, says J&K CM

SRINAGAR, 1 MARCH

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah reaffirmed his government's commitment to deliver on promises, as he dismissed the BJP claims of forming a shadow cabinet. "There is only one cabinet in India. Our government is dedicated to serving the people," Abdullah stated during a visit to offer condolences to the family of Ghulam Sibtain Masoodi, who recently passed away. In discussions about the impending holy month of Ramadan, Abdullah emphasised the responsibility of his administration to ensure essential services, including power, water, and sanitation, are maintained for citizens. He stated that all departments have been directed to uphold these standards. *—PTI*

Bangladeshi smuggler shot dead in Tripura

AGARTALA, 1 MARCH

A Bangladeshi national was killed by the Border Security Force (BSF) in Tripura's Sepahijala district following an attack by a group of smugglers at the international border. The incident, which occurred late on Friday, left one BSF personnel injured. According to the BSF, a group of 20 to 25 Bangladeshi miscreants crossed into Indian territory at Putia and engaged with several Indian accomplices. When challenged by the BSF, the smugglers retaliated, resulting in one border guard being hurt. In self-defence, a BSF soldier fired a shot from a pump-action gun, injuring one smuggler who was later taken to Bishalgarh hospital, where he died from his injuries. The injured BSF personnel is also receiving treatment at the same facility. *—PTI*

Ballot paper out of scope: Law ministry to ONOE panel

Says one nation one election not against federalism

NEW DELHI, 1 MARCH

The question of holding elections using ballot papers does not fall under the ambit of the joint committee of Parliament examining the two bills on simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies, the Union law ministry allegedly said.

Reverting to the ballot paper system was a suggestion made by some of the members of the joint committee and the law ministry was to respond to it in writing.

The ministry is learnt to have said that the suggestion on the use of the ballot paper system was "out of scope" of the parliamentary panel. Whether to use electronic voting machines (EVMs) or ballot paper is not the subject the panel is examining, they underlined.

The Supreme Court earlier ruled in favour of using EVMS and said that fears of tampering were unfounded PHOTO: PTI

The government has on multiple occasions told Parliament that it does not favour returning to the ballot paper system.

The Supreme Court too has recently rejected pleas for reviving paper ballots, holding that suspicions regarding tampering of voting machines were "unfounded".

The sources said that while the ministry answered some of the questions, some others were sent to the Election Commission for a calibrated response.

The ministry also said that holding simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies is not undemocratic and does not hurt the federal structure. Citing a report of the high-level committee on 'one nation, one election', the explainer said simultaneous polls promote consistency in governance.

"Due to the ongoing cycle of elections in various parts of the country, political parties, their leaders, legislators and both state and central governments often focus their efforts on preparing for elections rather than prioritising governance," it said, citing the "rationale" for holding simultaneous polls as recommended by the panel. *—PTI*

CPI(ML) Liberation questions CPI(M) note on 'neo-fascist'

NEW DELHI, 1 MARCH

Disapproving of the CPI(M) note clarifying that it does not consider the Modi government as "neo-fascist", CPI(ML) Liberation General Secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya said that any "downplaying of the fascist danger" at this juncture can only erode the electoral strength and moral authority of the communists.

His remarks came days after the CPI(M) issued the note to its state units on the draft political resolution for the upcoming party congress and stressed that the stand is different from that of the CPI and CPI(ML).

In an article on the website of the Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist) Liberation, Bhattacharya questioned if the CPI(M)'s stand is due to the immediate electoral circumstances faced by the party.

Dipankar Bhattacharya PHOTO: ANI

The draft political resolution of the CPI(M), which will be discussed at the party congress in Tamil Nadu's Madurai in April, said that "the push to impose a reactionary Hindutva agenda and the authoritarian drive to suppress the opposition and democracy display neo-fascist characteristics".

In the note, the CPI(M) clarified that talking about the political setup showing "neo-fascist characteristics" does not mean that the party is calling the Modi government fascist or neo-fascist.

Commenting on it, Bhattacharya said, "Perhaps the expression 'neo-fascism' had confused the CPI(M) ranks."

He said that the CPI(M) is in agreement with the wider progressive opinion in India and internationally which considers the RSS fascist.

Calling the demolition of the Babri mosque the first "unmistakable glimpse of the Sangh brigade's brazen fascist design", he said the CPI(ML) identified this moment as a communal fascist threat.

"After eleven years of unchecked consolidation of fascist forces at the helm of power, should Indian communists still wait longer to call the growing disaster by its historically known name?" Bhattacharya said. *—PTI*

Tamil Nadu BJP president K Annamalai, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin PHOTO: X

BJP to boycott all-party meet on delimitation

CHENNAI, 1 MARCH

- Annamalai called MK Stalin's fears about delimitation imaginary and said that all the estimates about seat changes were only rumours and speculations

Tamil Nadu BJP would not take part in the 5 March all-party meeting on the delimitation exercise, state BJP president K Annamalaiai said. He blamed Chief Minister MK Stalin for attempting to spread "imaginary fears" over the matter.

Writing to Stalin, Annamalai said his party firmly believed that Staling misconstrued the delimitation exercise and has convened the all-party meeting to " deliberately lie about it," even before any official statement was made.

Pointing to Union Home Minister Amit Shah's statement that no state would be "undermined," and that the exercise shall be on a pro rata basis, the Tamil Nadu BJP chief said, "You must understand that the announcement for the delimitation exercise will be made at an appropriate time by the delimitation commission and it is disheartening to notice that you have still not learnt lessons from the lies you spread when one nation one election was announced and later when those got debunked."

Wondering why the "imaginary fear" was not taken by the DMK in the Lok Sabha during the recent budget session, Annamalai, referring to Stalin's claim that the number of seats in the Lok Sabha was set to go up to 848, asked the basis for that claim

"We are not sure if you are privy to a confidential document indicating this actual number of 848 seats and we kindly request that you make the document public for the benefit of the people of Tamil Nadu."

A magazine has opined that the seats could be increased to 753 and tomorrow, some other media outlet may claim that the seats could be increased to 900, Annamalai said: "These are speculations, not official announcements. Based on these speculations, would you start contemplating how many seats Tamil Nadu would gain or lose?"

Meanwhile, Stalin turned 72 and said his opposition to Hindi imposition was his birthday message.

The CM said he opposed Hindi imposition with the very same vigour he showed against it in 1971 at a party conference when he was only 18-years old. Marking the occasion, Stalin inaugurated admissions at the Royappettai government school for the 2025-26 academic year. *—PTI*

TMC begins voter verification amid 'manipulations'

KOLKATA, 1 MARCH

Trinamool Congress leaders began a door-to-door campaign to scrutinise the electoral rolls amid allegations of voter list manipulation by the BJP ahead of next year's assembly polls in West Bengal.

Kolkata Mayor Firhad Hakim personally carried out the voter list verification drive in the Chetla area of south Kolkata.

"The BJP is trying to manipulate the electoral rolls by bringing in fake voters from other states. So, along with our party workers, we are on a door-to-door visit to verify the voter list," Hakim said.

The verification drive is being carried out by party workers in other places as well, as instructed by Banerjee. TMC claimed that several individuals from other states were registered in West Bengal. *—PTI*

'NARROW SLIT'

Dhankhar: Article 136 hurting arbitral process

NEW DELHI, 1 MARCH

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar addressed a conference on arbitration, expressing concerns over the misuse of the special leave petition provision, which he described as a "narrow slit" that is now hampering the arbitral process due to its expansive application. He specifically mentioned the repercussions of Article 136, which allows the Supreme Court to grant special leave to appeal from any judgement or order, impacting arbitration negatively.

Dhankhar emphasised the importance of including domain experts in arbitration, particularly for complex commercial disputes, referencing former Chief Justice DY Chandrachud's critique of the arbitral system being perceived as an "old boys club."

Jagdeep Dhankhar. PHOTO: PTI

While he acknowledged the value of retired judges in arbitration, he argued for the necessity of involving specialists in fields like oceanography, aviation, and infrastructure.

He also lamented that India is far from becoming a global hub for international arbitration, stating, "We are not in the minds of those engaged in international commercial relationships." *—PTI*

Kerala parties blame drugs for rising crimes

T'PURAM, 1 MARCH

Both the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the opposition United Democratic Front (UDF) in Kerala have acknowledged a troubling increase in violence within the state, attributing much of it to rampant drug abuse.

Excise Minister MB Rajesh stated that interventions and enforcement efforts to combat the drug menace were ongoing and effective. He cited over 24,000 arrests made in 2024 related to narcotics, boasting a 98 per cent conviction rate—the highest in India. Rajesh emphasised that the rise in violence, particularly among youth, necessitates a comprehensive approach that also considers underlying mental health issues. He urged the opposition to collaborate with the government rather than politicise the matter.

However, Leader of the Opposition VD Satheesan dismissed Rajesh's claims, asserting that the Left administration has failed to adequately tackle the drug issue.

Police personnel use water cannon to disperse Congress workers during a protest march in support of ASHA workers, in Kochi PHOTO: PTI

He reported an alarming trend of drug-related violence not previously witnessed in the state, criticising the government's focus on arresting minor consumers while neglecting the drug suppliers.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said that while crimes against women have come down in the state due to government interventions, their occurrence was still a matter of serious concern.

Vijayan, after inaugurating the International Women's Day celebrations organised by the Kerala Women's Commission (KWC), said that everyone needs to work together to ensure there are no crimes against women in the state.

—PTI

SURESH GOPI VOWS TO RAISE ASHA's DEMAND WITH PM

T'PURAM, 1 MARCH

Union Minister Suresh Gopi said he would convey the demands of the ASHA workers, who have been protesting seeking an increase in their honorarium and the provision of retirement benefits, to the central government.

After visiting the protest venue, Gopi, the Union Minister of State for Petroleum, Natural Gas and Tourism, said their agitation should not be undermined. "No one should belittle the cooperative system of any political ideology by ultimately dismissing it. Many political systems have harmed the people, and all of that will be brought to light," he added. *—PTI*

NXT CONCLAVE

India now emerging as factory of world: PM

NEW DELHI, 1 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted on Saturday that his "vocal for local" campaign is bearing fruit as Indian products are going global and making their presence felt across the world.

Speaking at the NXT conclave where the 'NewsX World' channel was launched, Modi also said that India was becoming the land of infinite innovations, finding affordable solutions and offering them to the world.

"The world is keenly watching 21st-century India. People from around the globe want to visit and understand India," Modi said. He said that the country was now emerging as a manufacturing hub.

"For decades, the world referred to India as their back office. Now, India is becoming the new factory of the world. We are no longer just a workforce but instead becoming a world force," Modi said. "From electronics to the automobile sector, the world has witnessed India's scale and capability.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during NXT Conclave, in Delhi PHOTO: PTI

- Speaking at the NXT conclave, Modi also said India was becoming the land of infinite innovations and offering them to the world

"We need to fully explore the country's agricultural potential and achieve more targets."

The Prime Minister highlighted record achievements in the agriculture sector, noting that foodgrain production has increased from 265 million tonnes a decade ago to over 330 million tonnes currently. Similarly, horticulture production has grown to exceed 350 million tonnes. *—PTI*

PM boasts of 56-inch chest, but silent about Trump: Owaisi

Hyderabad, 1 March

AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who boasts of a 56-inch chest in the country, was silent when US President Donald Trump announce. Addressing a gathering at the AIMIM headquarters on the occasion of the party's formation day he hit out at PM Modi's meeting with Trump. Owaisi quoted the US President as saying 'we will sell Narendra Modi F-35'. "Will Trump decide or we will decide? Our prime minister, who boasts of 56 inch chest in the country, was silent there," he said.

Court lets cops withdraw sedition case against Shehla

NEW DELHI , 1 MARCH

A Delhi court has permitted the police to withdraw a sedition case against Shehla Rashid Shora, the former vice president of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU), relating to her tweets about the Indian Army.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Anuj Kumar Singh issued the order on 27 February, following an application from the prosecution, which cited the withdrawal of prosecution sanctions by Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena.

The case, registered in 2019 based on a complaint from Alakh Alok Srivastava, involved serious charges, including sedition and inciting communal disharmony. Rashid's tweets from 18 August 2019 claimed that the Army had entered homes and "tortured" locals in Kashmir, accusations that the military dismissed as unfounded.

"Lt. Governor, Delhi has approved the recommendation of the Screening Committee...' the application said

Shehla Rashid Shora PHOTO : ANI

The proposal for the prosecution sanction was moved by the Delhi Police and supported by Home Department of the Delhi government, the L-G office said. Shora's tweets dated August 18, 2019 allegedly accused the Army of entering houses and "torturing" locals in Kashmir.

The allegations were rejected by the Army as baseless. The withdrawal of the case comes after a recommendation from a Screening Committee, with the LG's approval granted on 23 December 2024. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Shreya Ghoshal's X account hacked, singer warns fans

NEW DELHI, 1 MARCH

Singer Shreya Ghoshal has alerted her fans that her X account has been hacked since 13 February prompting her to caution followers against clicking any links sent from her profile. In a post on Instagram, the 40-year-old artist expressed her frustration over the lack of response from the X support team, despite her efforts to recover her account. "I have tried everything to reach out to the X team, but the responses have been limited to automated replies," Ghoshal stated. She added that she is unable to delete her account due to the hack. Ghoshal reassured her followers that she will provide a personal update via video once her account is secure. Earlier this year, actor Swara Bhasker's X account was also hacked but eventually restored. —*PTI*

Panic after bullets fired in Ambala court premises

AMBALA, 1 MARCH

Panic ensued at the Ambala Court complex on Saturday when two unidentified individuals opened fire into the air. Deputy Superintendent of Police Rajat Gulia reported that the assailants intended to target a person attending a court hearing related to a previous case. The shooters arrived in an SUV and fled the scene following the incident. Fortunately, no injuries were reported. Police recovered three empty cartridges from the location and suspect that the attack may be linked to a prior rivalry. Authorities are currently reviewing CCTV footage from nearby areas and are actively pursuing leads to apprehend the culprits. —*PTI*

19-year-old abducted and gangraped in MP

SHIVPURI, 1 MARCH

A 19-year-old woman was reportedly abducted and raped by two men in Madhya Pradesh's Shivpuri district, according to police. The arrests of both suspects occurred following the assault, which took place in the early hours of Friday within the jurisdiction of Bairad police station, approximately 50 km from the district headquarters. Station House Officer Shiv Singh Yadav revealed that the woman stepped out of her home around 1am to relieve herself when one of the men abducted her and took her to the residence of the second suspect, where she was allegedly sexually assaulted. After managing to escape, the woman returned home and recounted her horrific experience to her family. A case has been registered against the accused, charging them with abduction, gang rape, and intimidation. —*PTI*

Woman advocate attacked in Moradabad court

LUCKNOW, 1 MARCH

A woman lawyer was reportedly attacked with an inflammable substance by two male litigants at a court in Moradabad on Thursday morning. Advocate Shashibala, in her complaint, stated that after she was dropped her off near the court's entrance, Sachin Kumar and his relative Nitin Kumar ambushed her from behind and threw the substance. Kumar also allegedly pointed a makeshift pistol at her, stating, "today we will give you a very good gift." The assailants fled when Shashibala raised an alarm. She sustained burns to her clothes and body. Both men have been charged under relevant sections of the IPC. However, Superintendent of Police Kunwar Akash Singh noted that CCTV footage raised suspicions regarding their presence at the scene. —*PTI*

U'khand avalanche: 50 rescued, 4 dead, 5 trapped

Rain, snow hamper rescue; 2 sent for advanced treatment

DEHRADUN, 1 MARCH

Fifty workers have been pulled out of snow from the site of an avalanche-hit BRO camp in the Mana village in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district, but four of them died on Saturday as rescuers raced against time to save the remaining five.

The avalanche hit the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) camp between Mana and Badrinath between 5:30 am and 6 am on Friday, burying 55 workers inside eight containers and a shed, according to the Army. Thirty-three of them were rescued by Friday night.

Rain and snowfall hampered the rescue efforts on Friday and the operation was suspended as the night fell.

As the weather cleared up on Saturday morning, the Army and Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) personnel based in Mana resumed the rescue operation, District Disaster Management Officer N K Joshi said.

Six helicopters, including three of the Indian Army Aviation, two of the IAF and one civil copter hired by the Army, are engaged in the rescue operations, an Army spokesperson said.

Rescue operation after several labourers were trapped under snow following an avalanche, in Mana, Uttarakhand, on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

"Fifty labourers have been rescued out of which, unfortunately, four injured have been confirmed as fatal casualties while the search for the remaining five is underway," the Army spokesperson said.

The injured were being prioritised for evacuation, he said.

Sources said that two of the rescued workers have been taken to AIIMS-Rishikesh for advanced treatment.

According to the Army spokesperson, Lt Gen Anindya Sengupta GOC-in C Central Command and Lt Gen D G Mishra GOC Uttar Bharat area have reached the avalanche site to monitor the rescue operations.

There were eight containers at the BRO camp, of which five have been traced while three are missing. Many of the rescued labourers were found in the five containers.

Located three kilometres from Badrinath, Mana is the last village on the India-Tibet border at a height of 3,200 metres. —*PTI*

4 workers located in Telangana tunnel

NAGARKURNOOL, 1 MARCH

In a major breakthrough in the tunnel collapse rescue operation in Telangana the whereabouts of four of the total eight persons trapped has been located, state Excise Minister Jupally Krishna Rao said on Saturday.

Krishna Rao, who attended a meeting with officials involved in the rescue operation with Irrigation Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy, said.

"The whereabouts of four persons have been located through radar," he said. He expressed hope they would be extricated by Sunday evening.

The other four appear to have been stuck beneath the Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM), he said.

Asked about the condition of the four whose whereabouts have been found, the minister recalled he had said on the first day itself that the chances of survival are remote.

The 450 ft tall TBM was being cut, he said.

The skilled personnel of about 500 people from 11 agencies are involved in the operation. Rescue teams engaged in extricating the eight trapped workers after the SLBC tunnel partially collapsed last week. —*PTI*

Rescue on to trace workers trapped inside the collapsed tunnel in Nagarkurnool, Telangana PHOTO: PTI

SC raps HC for overstepping

NEW DELHI, 1 MARCH

Frowning upon courts overstepping jurisdiction, the Supreme Court has set aside an order of the Allahabad High Court which directed the Director of Narcotics Control Bureau to pay Rs 5 lakh as compensation to a man for alleged wrongful confinement.

A bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and Manmohan said the grant of compensation was entirely unjustified and contrary to law.

The apex court was hearing an appeal filed by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) challenging an order of the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court.

The NCB had seized 1,280 grams of brown powder (allegedly heroin) from the possession of Man Singh Verma and Aman Singh. Accordingly, criminal case was registered against Verma and he was remanded to judicial custody.

However, the substance tested negative for heroin and other narcotic substances. As a result, NCB filed a closure report and the respondent was released.

PHOTO: ANI

Despite the closure report and the respondent's release, the high court adjudicated the pending bail application and observed that the respondent who had been wrongfully confined for four months and, directed the NCB Director to pay compensation.

Commenting on the HC order, the apex court said, "Time and again, the act of courts overstepping the bounds of jurisdiction, has clearly been frowned upon. The instant case is another such example." —*PTI*

SC: States must compensate GRAP hit workers

NEW DELHI, 1 MARCH

The Supreme Court directed Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan to pay compensation to construction workers whenever they are affected by the closure of activities due to GRAP measures in Delhi-NCR even if there is no specific court order on it.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said "We have issued directions to the state to pay compensation. We make it clear that hereafter whenever the construction activities are required to be closed due to implementation of GRAP measures, compensation shall be paid to the affected workers."

Anti-pollution measures under Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) are implemented based on average air quality in Delhi-NCR. —*PTI*

CM GIVES NOD

Andhra ASHA workers get gratuity, paid maternity leave

AMARAVATI, 1 MARCH

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has approved the payment of gratuity, paid maternity leave and the increase of retirement age to Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA).

The Chief Minister directed officials to ensure gratuity payments to ASHA workers, who serve as a vital link between people and the healthcare system.

"This amounts to providing a sizeable retirement benefit of Rs 1.50 lakh to each ASHA worker who puts in 30 years of service," said an official press release on Saturday.

42,752 workers are set to benefit from the decision, the release said.

He approved the extension of 180 days of paid maternity leave for the first two deliveries of eligible health workers.

Chandrababu Naidu PHOTO: X

Further, Naidu raised the superannuation age of ASHA workers from 60 to 62, the press release added.

Currently, ASHA workers receive a monthly salary of Rs 10,000. Upon completion of their service, they will now be eligible for a gratuity payment of Rs 1.5 lakh.

The move comes after ASHA workers have been demanding better benefits and compensations across several states for years. —*PTI with Agencies*

New India Co-Operative Bank couple wanted

MUMBAI, 1 MARCH

The former chairperson and vice chairperson of New India Co-Operative Bank, Hiren Bhanu, and his wife, Gauri Bhanu, are wanted in connection with the embezzlement of Rs 122 crore at the lender.

Both Hiren, 58, and Gauri, 50, who are currently abroad, occupied the two posts when the embezzlement took place, the official said on Friday. The case is being probed by the Mumbai police's Economic Offences Wing.

The couple allegedly received Rs 28 crore from the embezzled amount.

"Hiren is now a British national. The couple is abroad at present," an official said.

The EOW has arrested the main accused, Hitesh Mehta, the bank's general manager and head of accounts, the bank's former CEO Abhimanyu Bhoan and real estate developer Dharmesh Paun. —*PTI*

Heavy rains, snowfall block roads, disrupt life in Himachal

SHIMLA, 1 MARCH

Heavy rains and snowfall disrupted normal life in several parts of Himachal triggering landslides, blocking roads and huge mounds of debris swept by gushing waters damaging vehicles in Kullu.

A massive landslide triggered by incessant rains and cloudbursts at Rokaru (Multhan) in Kangra district damaged several vehicles and endangered 12 houses. The affected families have been relocated to safer places. Similarly, a landslide at Tohlu Nallah blocked the Kiratpur-Manali national Highway and several left tourists stranded.

A total of 112 roads were closed in Kullu and work is in progress to power 1646 transformers that were affected by the storms. A total of 125 water supply schemes have been disrupted said Kullu DC, Tarul Ravesh.

One person was reported missing near Shiva Hydropower project in Palampur. Search operations have been launched to trace him. Tribal Pangi valley in Chamba was cut off following heavy snowfall and electricity and telecommunication services. Several houses in Nallahs and Khuds were under threats of landslides and electricity and water supply were still disrupted. —*PTI*

People walk during heavy rainfall in Shimla PHOTO: PTI

Dwarka residents protest entry fee for local park

NEW DELHI, 1 MARCH

Residents of Dwarka staged a protest against the entry fee imposed by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) for access to a public park in Sector 16 D. Protesters questioned the rationale behind the fee, emphasising that the park had been free to the public until recently.

One resident said, "This park belongs to the public, so why should we have to pay to enter?" He noted that the sudden enforcement of the fee was unfair, especially for regular visitors.

Protesters donned neon green shirts and chanted slogans against the DDA, demanding the removal of the fee. —*PTI*

School student succumbs to injuries after clash in Kerala

KOZHIKODE, 1 MARCH

A Class 10 student succumbed to his injuries early on Saturday after he suffered severe head injuries in a clash between students. The student was reportedly hit with a nun-chuck, a martial arts weapon.

Muhammed Shahabas, 16, who was in the ICU, died around 1.00am.

Muhammed Shahabas PHOTO: X

Five students have been taken into custody in connection with the incident. They will be presented before the Juvenile Justice Board.

The altercation reportedly stemmed from a dispute during a farewell party at a tuition centre on 23 February. The argument escalated, leading to another altercation on Thursday, where Shahabas was allegedly hit with a nun-chuck.

General Education Minister V Sivankutty on Saturday directed the Director of General Education to initiate a departmental inquiry into the incident and expressed condolences over the student's death.

Initially, Shahabas did not appear to have suffered serious injuries and was taken to Thamarassery Taluk Hospital. However, after returning home, his condition worsened, and he was shifted to Kozhikode Medical College Hospital, where he passed away after being on ventilator support. —*PTI*

IIT Baba alleges assault on live TV debate in Noida

NOIDA, 1 MARCH

A dramatic incident unfolded in Noida when 'IIT Baba', alias Abhay Singh, claimed he was assaulted during a live news debate programme on a private channel. According to Singh, a group of saffron-clad individuals stormed into the newsroom, misbehaved with him, and physically assaulted him with sticks.

The incident has sparked outrage and concern, with many questioning the safety and security of public figures. Singh, a prominent figure from the Maha Kumbh, has been a vocal critic of various social and political issues.

Singh had lodged a complaint with the police, but later withdrew it after being convinced by the authorities.

Abhay Singh or 'IIT Baba' PHOTO: X

Bhupendra Singh, the Station House Officer, confirmed that Singh was convinced not to pursue the matter further.

Many expressed concern about the police's handling of the situation, with some saying that they were pressured to downplay the incident. The incident has sparked a heated debate about the role of the media in promoting hate speech and violence. —*PTI*

INSENSITIVE REMARKS

TN govt transfers collector who blamed 3-yr-old for sexual assault

CHENNAI, 1 MARCH

The Tamil Nadu government transferred Mayiladuthurai district collector AP Mahabharathi after his alleged remark blaming the behaviour of a 3-year-old sexual abuse victim for the assault.

Addressing a sensitisation programme, Mahabharathi allegedly said on Friday that the three-and-a-half year old child had behaved in a "wrong way" and had spit on the face of the assailant which could have been the reason for the assault.

Hence, he allegedly said, it was important to consider both sides in a POCSO case.

Mahabharathi PHOTO: X

The collector's remark went viral on social media and led to an outrage and several users asked how a child could be aware of the consequences of its acts and they expressed shock that official had not given a thought to it.

Following the rage over the insensitive remark, the official was transferred out of Mayiladuthurai and has not been assigned any fresh role, sources said.

A 16-year old boy was the assailant in the case of sexual assault of the three-and a half year old child in Mayiladuthurai. —*PTI*

Amritsar airport siezes narcotics worth Rs 8.17 cr

AMRITSAR, 1 MARCH

A passenger at Amritsar airport was arrested for possession of narcotics worth about Rs 8 crore.

The passenger, Mandeep Singh, arrived in a flight from Malaysia on 26 February.

When his baggage was inspected, officials found 8.17 kg of a narcotics substance that appeared to be ganja, with an estimated value of Rs 8.17 crore.

Singh was booked under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985.

In a separate case, customs officials said they seized 400 grams of gold from a passenger from Singapore. —*PTI*

What Trump & Zelenskyy said during heated fight

President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance on Friday berated Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy over the war in Ukraine, accusing him of not showing gratitude after he challenged Vance on the question of diplomacy with Russia's Vladimir Putin.

The argument in the Oval Office was broadcast globally. It led to the rest of Zelenskyy's White House visit being canceled and called into question how much the U.S. will still support Ukraine in its defense against Russia's 2022 invasion.

Here is a transcript of the key moments of the exchange, which began when Zelenskyy challenged Vance.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy with his US counterpart President Donald Trump in the Oval Office at White House **PHOTO: PTI**

Vance: "For four years, the US, we had a president who stood up at press conferences and talked tough about Vladimir Putin, and then Putin invaded Ukraine and destroyed a chunk of the country. The path to peace and the path to prosperity is, maybe, engaging in diplomacy. We tried the pathway of Joe Biden, of thumping our chest and pretending that the president of the US words mattered more than his actions. What makes America a good country is America engaging in diplomacy. That's what President Trump is doing."

Zelenskyy: "Can I ask you?"

Vance: "Sure. Yeah."

Zelenskyy: "OK. So he (Putin) occupied it, our parts, big parts of Ukraine, parts of east and Crimea. So he occupied it in 2014. So during a lot of years — I'm not speaking about just Biden, but those times was (Barack) Obama, then President Obama, then President Trump, then President Biden, now President Trump. And God bless, now, President Trump will stop him. But during 2014, nobody stopped him. He just occupied and took. He killed people. You know what the --"

Zelenskyy: "During 2014 'til 2022, the situation is the same, that people have been dying on the contact line. Nobody stopped him. You know that we had conversations with him, a lot of conversations, my bilateral conversation. And we signed with him, me, like, you, president, in 2019, I signed with him the deal. I signed with him, (French President Emmanuel) Macron and (former German Chancellor Angela) Merkel. We signed ceasefire. All of them told me that he will never go … But after that, he broke the ceasefire, he killed our people, and he didn't exchange prisoners. We signed the exchange of prisoners. But he didn't do it. What kind of diplomacy, JD, you are speaking about? What do you mean?"

Vance: "I'm talking about the kind of diplomacy that's going to end the destruction of your country. Mr. President, with respect, I think it's disrespectful for you to come into the Oval Office to try to litigate this in front of the American media. Right now, you guys are going around and forcing conscripts to the front lines because you have manpower problems."

Zelenskyy: "Have you ever been to Ukraine that you say what problems we have?"

Vance: "I have been to –"

Zelenskyy: "Come once."

Vance: "I've actually watched and seen the stories, and I know that what happens is you bring people, you bring them on a propaganda tour, Mr President. Do you disagree that you've had problems, bringing people into your military? And do you think that is respectful to come to the Oval Office and attack the administration that is trying to prevent the destruction of your country?"

Zelenskyy: "First of all, during the war, everybody has problems, even you. But you have nice ocean and don't feel now. But you will feel it in the future. God bless –"

Trump: "You don't know that. Don't tell us what we're going to feel. We're trying to solve a problem."

Zelenskyy: "I'm not telling you. I am answering on these questions."

Trump: "You are in no position to dictate what we're going to feel. We're going to feel very good."

Zelenskyy: "You will feel influenced."

Trump: "We are going to feel very good and very strong."

Zelenskyy: "I am telling you. You will feel influenced."

Trump: "You're, right now, not in a good position. You've allowed yourself to be in a bad position. You're not in a good position. You don't have the cards right now. With us, you start having cards."

Zelenskyy: "I'm not playing cards. I'm serious."

Trump: "You're playing cards. You're gambling with the lives of millions of people. You're gambling with World War III." And what you're doing is very disrespectful to the country, this country that's backed you far more than a lot of people said they should have."

Vance: "Have you said thank you once?"

Zelenskyy: "A lot of times. Even today."

Vance: "No, in this entire meeting. You went to Pennsylvania and campaigned for the Opposition in October."

Zelenskyy: "No."

Vance: "Offer some words of appreciation for the US and the president who's trying to save your country."

Zelenskyy: "Please. You think that if you will speak very loudly about the war, you can –"

Trump: "He's not speaking loudly. He's not speaking loudly. Your country is in trouble."

Zelenskyy: "Can I answer —"

Trump: "No, no. You've done a lot of talking. Your country is in big trouble."

Zelenskyy: "I know. I know."

Trump: "You're not winning. You have a good chance of coming out OK because of us."

Zelenskyy: "Mr President, we are staying in our country, staying strong. From the very beginning of the war, we've been alone. And we are thankful."

Trump: "If you didn't have our military equipment, this war would have been over in two weeks."

Zelenskyy: "In three days. I heard it from Putin. In three days."

Trump: "Maybe less. It's going to be a very hard thing to do business like this, I tell you.

Vance: "Just say thank you."

Zelenskyy: "I said a lot of times, thank you, to American people."

Vance: "Accept that there are disagreements, and let's go litigate those disagreements rather than trying to fight it out in the American media when you're wrong."

Trump: "But you see, I think it's good for the American people to see what's going on. That's why I kept this going so long. You have to be thankful."

Zelenskyy: "I'm thankful."

Trump: "You don't have the cards. You're buried there. People are dying. You're running low on soldiers. It would be a damn good thing, and then you tell us, I don't want a ceasefire. I don't want a ceasefire, I want to go, and I want this.' Look, if you can get a ceasefire right now, I tell you, you take it so the bullets stop flying and your men stop getting killed."

Zelenskyy: "Of course we want to stop the war. But I said to you, with guarantees."

Trump: "Are you saying you don't want a ceasefire? I want a ceasefire. Because you'll get a ceasefire faster than an agreement."

Zelenskyy: "Ask our people about a ceasefire, what they think."

Trump: "That wasn't with me. That was with a guy named Biden, who is not a smart person."

Zelenskyy: "This is your president. It was your president."

Trump: "Excuse me. That was with Obama, who gave you sheets, and I gave you Javelins. I gave you the Javelins to take out all those tanks. Obama gave you sheets. In fact, the statement is Obama gave sheets, and Trump gave Javelins. You've got to be more thankful because let me tell you, you don't have the cards. With us, you have the cards, but without us, you don't have any cards."

Trump: "What, if anything? What if the bomb drops on your head right now? OK, what if they broke it? I don't know, they broke it with Biden because Biden, they didn't respect him. They didn't respect Obama. They respect me. Let me tell you, Putin went through a hell of a lot with me. He went through a phony witch hunt … But he didn't break them with me. He wants to make a deal. I don't know if you can make a deal." "The problem is I've empowered you (turning toward Zelenskyy) to be a tough guy, and I don't think you'd be a tough guy without the US. And your people are very brave. But you're either going to make a deal or we're out. And if we're out, you'll fight it out. I don't think it's going to be pretty, but you'll fight it out. But you don't have the cards. But once we sign that deal, you're in a much better position." —*PTI*

SALAR

Dry winter, late snow & rain led to Chamoli avalanche

A warming planet is leading to a change in the patterns of snowfall and rainfall in the fragile Himalayas. The avalanche that struck Uttarakhand's Chamoli district and buried 55 workers of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) is likely an outcome of climate change, as per experts.

On 28 February, 2025, the workers were buried under snow after being hit by an avalanche between Badrinath and Mana in Chamoli district. Of these, 47 workers have been rescued, one of whom is in a critical condition, as per sources. Eight workers are still unaccounted for. Rescue efforts are on to locate and rescue them.

The district magistrate of Chamoli confirmed the incident on February 28 but also said there is no proper communication system and due to continuous snowfall, it is not possible to reach the location by helicopter. Chamoli Police has released some photographs of the incident site, in which workers are seen carrying some people on their shoulders.

According to reports, the incident occurred around noon. The 55 BRO workers were working to remove snow from the road at Ghistauli between Mana and Mana Bypass when they were hit by an avalanche. According to another report, the avalanche struck around 5 am when snow-clearing workers of the BRO were sleeping in their tin shed.

Once the doors of the sacred shrine of Badrinath close for the winter, this entire area remains deserted. But due to its strategic importance, the BRO is always deployed, entrusted with the task of removing snow from the roads.

According to scientists, the late rain and snow caused due to a warming climate is responsible for the disaster.

Winter across North India, including Uttarakhand, was almost dry this year. During this period, there was heavy rainfall at some places for one or two days, but this rainfall was only 9 per cent of the normal. Usually, Uttarakhand receives 75.7mm rainfall from 1 January to 15 February. But this year, only 6.9mm rainfall was received in this period.

When the rains started on 27 February, within 24 hours the state had received 37.1mm rainfall, which was 1,339 per cent more than the normal. The difference of rainfall in the entire season consequently reduced from 91 per cent to 48 per cent. Even after this, rain continued throughout the day on 28 February. Thus, the amount of rain that should have fallen in the entire season was received in just two days.

Alongside the late winter heavy rainfall that Uttarakhand has been witnessing increasingly of late, it has also recorded snowfall shifting to February and March, instead of December and January.

All this increases the risk of an avalanche. SP Sati, head of the environment department at the VCSG Uttarakhand University of Horticulture and Forestry in Pauri, pointed out that earlier, there used to be snowfall in the High and Middle Himalayas in the months of December and January.

At that time the ground remains quite cold, due to which the grip of fresh snow becomes stronger on the ground.

But now, snowfall is happening in February and March instead of December and January.

According to Sati, in this season, the ground becomes warmer than in December-January and the density of fresh snow is less. This fresh snow is unable to hold on to the ground. In such a situation, when there is heavy snowfall, the weakly held snow on the ground below slips and an avalanche occurs.

This is not the first time that an avalanche has happened during February-March. In March 2021, 8 to 10 labourers died due to an avalanche in the catchment area of the Dhauliganga river. There was also the Rishiganga disaster of 7 February during the same year.

This incident was caused by the breakage of the hanging glacier in the catchment area of the Rishiganga river. In this incident, the hydro power plant in Raini was completely destroyed and hundreds of workers in the under-construction project in Tapovan were killed.

According to Sati, the possibility of more such incidents occurring in the coming years due to the shifting snowfall season is rising.

He blamed this change in the snowfall season on global warming and added that it is a big threat not only to the Himalayas but to the glaciers of the entire world.

Usually, frost occurs after snowfall in December-January. This frost strengthens the fresh snow, which later becomes a part of the glacier.

But, as per Sati, the snow falling in February and March melts as soon as it falls and is not converted into glaciers.

This simply means that the area of glaciers is likely to continue decreasing in the coming years. Along with this, there is also a possibility of an increase in the number of avalanches due to snowfall in the months of February and March.

—C*ourtesy, DownToEarth*

Rescue operation underway after BRO workers got trapped under an avalanche in Chamoli, Uttarakhand **PHOTO: PTI**

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Are India and EU growing closer as global alliances shift?

European Commission Chief Ursula von der Leyen started her two-day visit to India on Thursday, accompanied by the entire college of commissioners — all of the top leaders of the European Union's executive branch.

India and the European Union already cooperate closely on issues like foreign policy, defence and technology development. Now Brussels is ramping up efforts to finalise a long-delayed free trade agreement with the world's most populous country.

The Foreign Ministry said the trip will pave the way for "strengthening bilateral partnership based on growing convergences."

Both sides hoped to boost cooperation in digital innovation and sustainable tech areas with the meeting of the India-EU Trade and Technology Council, a bilateral body comprised of selected EU commissioners and Indian ministers.

EU trying to 'diversify partnerships'

Foreign policy experts and diplomats say the EU is currently keen on reducing dependence on traditional allies like the United States while still being wary of China.

"The visit comes at a critical moment as Europe navigates a rupturing trans-Atlantic alliance and a disruptive [Donald] Trump presidency. This also comes on top of continuing concerns about China's assertiveness and Russia's aggression," Ajay Bisaria, a former diplomat, told DW.

"This disruptive behaviour of the major powers that provided it cheap security, goods and energy, drives the EU to actively diversify its partnerships, and India has emerged as a natural partner," he added.

Trade deal still in limbo

India and the EU are trying to expedite a free trade agreement and boost collaboration in clean technology as well as looking at strategic alignment in the face of potential US tariffs.

But multiple issues regarding the trade deal, including market access for products such as cars or alcoholic beverages, are still causing issues.

There are also differences on intellectual property protections, specifically India's insistence that investors exhaust local remedies in the country before seeking international arbitration.

The next round of negotiations is set to take place in March.

Response to China's 'Belt and Road'

Gulshan Sachdeva, a European Studies professor who also serves as chief coordinator of India's Global South Centre of Excellence, says expanding ties with the EU goes beyond just the free trade deal.

President of the European Commission Ursula Von Der Leyen and Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

"Even if a trade agreement remains elusive, the current global geopolitical fragmentation offers new opportunities for the world's two largest democratic entities to collaborate in areas such as technology and connectivity," Sachdeva told DW.

He also said that India had been engaging extensively with major European powers on a bilateral basis, but it also recognized the importance of fostering relationships with the EU as a bloc.

He pointed to India's desire to modernise and a growing convergence of interests in the Indo-Pacific.

According to Sachdeva, both sides are actively exploring new avenues through initiatives such as the Trade and Technology Council and the ambitious India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), which aims to bolster traffic and communication between Europe and Asia. IMEC is often described as a response to China's ambitious, multibillion-dollar "Belt and Road" program.

"Moreover, India's engagement with the EU has expanded beyond its traditional focus on major states to forge new linkages with the Nordics, Central and Eastern Europe, and the Mediterranean region," Sachdeva said.

EU still wants 'de-risking' from China

Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, the head of the Mantraya Institute of Strategic Studies in India, told DW that ties between New Delhi and Brussels were not yet fully optimized. While working with the US and the EU, India also boasts strong ties with Russia.

"The EU remains critical of India's position on the Ukraine war. On the other hand, India considers the EU's carbon border adjustment mechanism and deforestation legislation to be unfair," D'Souza said.

Despite these differences, however, both India and the EU have a strategic partnership that touch upon issues including security, climate change, and sustainable development. India is also not immune to the current geopolitical turbulence coming from the US, she added.

"India is evaluating its response to the Trump administration's unilateral actions regarding tariffs and immigration," D'Souza said.

The visit by Ursula von der Leyen and other top EU officials presents a chance for "serious dialogue" on a whole range of issues, she noted. These include "trade, green technology, education, health, AI, expanding defense relationship, Indo-Pacific and de-risking from China, particularly for Europe."

New geopolitical alignment?

Over 6,000 European companies are present in India, and trade in goods has increased by almost 90 per cent over the past decade. According to the European Commission, the EU as a whole is now India's largest trading partner, ahead of the US and China. In 2023, exports and imports to the European bloc accounted for $130 billion (₹124 billion) or 12.2% of total Indian trade.

"This visit marks a historic milestone in EU-India relations and is critical because it reflects a mutual recognition of each other's growing global authority and a push to turn that into action — whether through trade deals, tech partnerships, or a stronger geopolitical alignment," C Raja Mohan, a visiting professor at Singapore's Institute of South Asian Studies, told DW.

Earlier this month, Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar emphasised the strategic importance of the India-EU relationship in navigating global challenges.

"In a world that promises to be so volatile and so uncertain, a stronger India-EU relationship can be an important stabilizing factor," he said. —*DW News*

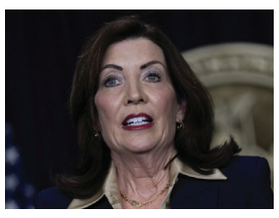


PHOTO: X

Drop Palestinian studies job listing: NY Guv to college

NEW YORK, 1 MARCH

New York's Governor ordered a state school to remove a job posting for a Palestinian studies teaching position this week, saying she wanted to ensure "antisemitic theories" would not be taught. The job posting at Hunter College had called for a historian "who takes a critical lens to issues pertaining to Palestine including but not limited to settler-colonialism, genocide, human rights, apartheid, migration, climate and infrastructure devastation, health, race, gender, and sexuality," according to screenshots published by the New York Post, which first reported the job announcement. Gov Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, ordered the City University of New York school to remove the posting. *—PTI*

Pakistan's tax shortfall reaches Rs 189B: Report

ISLAMABAD, 1 MARCH

Pakistan's tax shortfall has surged to PKR 606 billion (INR 189.45 billion) in the first eight months of the fiscal year, intensifying scrutiny over the government's compliance with International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditions. The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) collected PKR 7.342 trillion against a target of PKR 7.95 trillion, despite a notable 28 per cent growth year-on-year. The government missed February's revenue target by PKR 138 billion, leading to growing pressure for tax reforms that disproportionately affect the salaried class. Meanwhile, the World Bank announced a ten-year development plan for Pakistan, focusing on clean energy and education. As inflation stabilises, an IMF mission is set to review the USD 7 billion loan next week. *—PTI*

IMF releases fourth tranche of aid to Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, 1 MARCH

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has approved the release of USD 334 million as the fourth tranche of its USD 2.9 billion bailout package to Sri Lanka, aiding the nation's recovery from its 2022 bankruptcy. Following the completion of the third review under the Extended Fund Facility, total funding now amounts to approximately USD 1.3 billion. The IMF noted that while Sri Lanka met most quantitative targets and structural benchmarks, an indicative target on social spending was missed. The bond exchange is seen as a significant step towards restoring debt sustainability. Despite a fragile economy, the IMF emphasised the importance of sustaining reform efforts. *—PTI*

Eleven dead in ferry collision in southern China

BEIJING, 1 MARCH

A tragic accident occurred on the Yuanshui River in Hunan province, southern China, when a small ferry was struck by an oil spill cleaning vessel, resulting in the deaths of 11 people and leaving five others unaccounted for. The incident, which took place on Tuesday morning, caused 19 individuals to fall overboard, with three rescued on the same day, according to state media Xinhua. Rescue teams recovered the damaged ferry on Friday night and continued their search efforts. Reports indicate that one survivor escaped by breaking a window. Witness footage showed the larger vessel colliding with the ferry in calm waters. Authorities have opened an investigation into the incident, while calls to local government officials went unanswered. *—PTI*

Leaders back Zelenskyy amid WH showdown

Zelenskyy left the Oval Office after what was described as an unprecedented verbal clash

NEW YORK, 1 MARCH

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy recently concluded a visit to the White House, marked by a confrontational exchange with President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance. The meeting highlighted growing tensions between the United States and European allies regarding support for Ukraine.

Zelenskyy left the Oval Office after what was described as an unprecedented verbal clash. During the heated discussion, Trump accused Zelenskyy of "gambling with the lives of millions" and suggested he was being disrespectful for seeking help from the U.S. Vance also interjected, questioning Zelenskyy's motives when referring to Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014.

Despite the tensions, global leaders rallied behind Zelenskyy, conveying messages of support on social media. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen expressed solidarity, while French President Emmanuel Macron reaffirmed Europe's commitment to Ukraine and condemned Russian aggression.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy with US President Donald Trump in the Oval Office at the White House **PHOTO: PTI**

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni called for an EU-US summit to address diplomatic efforts concerning Ukraine. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo also voiced continued support for Ukraine, highlighting its fight for sovereignty and democracy.

In contrast to international support for Zelenskyy, the White House issued a statement praising Trump's "America First" approach, claiming he would not allow the U.S. to be taken advantage of. Prominent Republicans expressed their approval, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio thanking Trump for his stance.

After the meeting, Zelenskyy released a post expressing gratitude for the U.S. support and reiterated Ukraine's strive for a just and lasting peace.

In response to the contentious exchange, Russian officials, including Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, criticized Zelenskyy, asserting that he was not alone in receiving assistance from the West. The fallout from the meeting underscores the complexities and challenges facing the U.S.-Ukraine relationship amid ongoing conflict with Russia. *—PTI*

Federal workers told to list achievements

Federal workers are now receiving a second email from the Trump administration, requiring them to outline their recent achievements. Initiated by President Trump and Elon Musk, this effort aims to scrutinise government workers. The email requests five accomplishments from the previous week and threatens disciplinary action for noncompliance. Meanwhile, the Education Department has offered voluntary buyouts amid impending layoffs. *-PTI*

RUSSIA CALLS TRUMP'S RESTRAINT WITH ZELENSKYY A 'MIRACLE'

MOSCOW, 1 MARCH

Russia reacted with mockery following a heated verbal clash between Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during a recent meeting at the White House.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova expressed that it was a "miracle" Trump refrained from physical confrontation. She derided Zelenskyy's claims of Ukraine standing alone, calling it his "biggest lie."

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev argued that the Ukrainian leader's regime was "gambling with World War III" and suggested halting military aid to Ukraine. *—PTI*

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION APPROVES $3 BILLION ARMS SALE TO ISRAEL

WASHINGTON, 1 MARCH

The Trump administration has authorised a significant arms sale to Israel, totalling nearly USD 3 billion, and bypassing the usual congressional review process. This enables Israel to acquire more of the 2,000-pound bombs used in its conflict. The State Department notified Congress that it has approved the sale of over 35,500 MK 84 and BLU-117 bombs, along with 4,000 Predator warheads. Secretary of State Marco Rubio ubio granted approval for another munitions package to Israel valued at USD 675.7 million and sale of D9R and D9T Caterpillar bulldozers worth USD 295 million. *—PTI*

Zelenskyy's jab after White House clash: Thank You, POTUS

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 1 MARCH

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has thanked US President Donald Trump and the country for its support after departing the White House following an unprecedented showdown in the Oval Office with the American leader and Vice President JD Vance.

During an intense Oval Office meeting on Friday, Trump shouted at Zelenskyy, accusing him of "risking millions of lives" and warning that his actions might lead to World War III.

> **Thank you America, thank you for your support, thank you for this visit. Thank you @POTUS, Congress, and the American people. Ukraine needs just and lasting peace, and we are working exactly for that.**
>
> -Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine President

Trump and Vance also accused Zelenskyy of not being thankful for the support the US has provided over the years and said the Ukrainian leader was in a "bad position" at the negotiating table with Russia on a potential peace deal.

In response, Zelenskyy abruptly departed the White House without signing a crucial minerals agreement with the US, which Trump had insisted upon and implied was a prerequisite for continued support to Ukraine. *—PTI*

Israeli military eliminates Hezbollah operative

TEL AVIV, 1 MARCH

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) reported that, in the Al-Harmal area in Lebanon, an Israel Air Force aircraft attacked and killed Muhammad Mahdi Ali Shahin, a Hezbollah terrorist who was involved in the concentration of terrorist transactions for the purchase of weapons on the Syria-Lebanon border after the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Lebanon came into force.

The IDF explained that, as part of his work for Hezbollah, Shaheen was given the responsibility to carry out terrorist transactions for the purchase of weapons for the terrorist organization and to coordinate the arrival of the shipments and their distribution to the various units, in order to continue the re-establishment of Hezbollah's armed capabilities that were devastated by Israel's attacks over the past 15 months.

In this framework, Shahin worked with various traders or smugglers who operate on the Syria-Lebanon border and who cooperate with the terrorist organization Hezbollah.

Shahin's activities constituted a threat to the State of Israel and its citizens and blatantly violated the understandings between Israel and Lebanon, explained the IDF.

Meanwhile, the first phase of the Israel-Hamas truce that took effect on 19 January expired on Saturday. The two sides have yet to decide on the next steps. Under the terms of the agreement, fighting in Gaza is to remain suspended as long as both sides continue negotiations for a second phase. *—Agencies*

Lebanese soldiers block a road that links to the scene where Israeli airstrikes attacked a vehicle in Najariyeh village **PHOTO: X**

Pope rests after setback requiring ventilation

ROME, 1 MARCH

Pope Francis is resting following a concerning setback in his recovery from double pneumonia. Doctors placed the 88-year-old pontiff on non-invasive mechanical ventilation after he experienced a coughing fit, during which he inhaled vomit that required extraction. The Vatican reported that it will take one or two days to assess the impact of this episode on his overall health, with a guarded prognosis indicating he remains in danger.

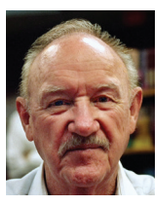
The Vatican's morning update noted that the pope passed a quiet night and was resting comfortably. The episode on Friday marked a worrying development in what had previously been two days of encouraging reports from his medical team. Previously, Francis had been hospitalized for over two weeks due to pneumonia, arising from complications from bronchitis.

As prayers for his health continue, Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernández led a prayer vigil in St. Peter's Square, asking for blessings not only for Francis but for all those suffering worldwide. *—PTI*

Gene Hackman, wife test negative for carbon monoxide

SANTA FE, 1 MARCH

Preliminary autopsy results didn't determine how Oscar-winner Gene Hackman and his wife died at their home in Santa Fe, New Mexico, but did rule out that they were killed by carbon monoxide poisoning, the sheriff leading the investigation has said.



The condition of the bodies found Wednesday indicated the deaths occurred at least several days earlier and there was no sign of foul play.

At a news conference on Friday, Santa Fe County Sheriff Adan Mendoza said the initial examination by the medical examiner showed no sign of carbon monoxide, a colourless and odourless gas produced from kitchen appliances and other fuel-burning items. When it collects in poorly ventilated homes, it can be fatal.

Mendoza also said an examination of the 95-year-old Hackman's pacemaker showed it stopped working on 17 February, which means he may have died nine days earlier.

Hackman's body was found in an entryway. The body of his wife, Betsy Arakawa, 65, was in a bathroom. She was on her side and a space heater was near her head. Investigators said the heater likely was pulled down when she fell. *—PTI*

Kurdish militants declare truce in 40-year insurgency in Turkiye

ISTANBUL, 1 MARCH

Kurdish militants who have waged a 40-year insurgency in Turkiye declared a ceasefire on Saturday, two days after their imprisoned leader called for the group to disarm.

The statement from the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, was published by the Firat News Agency, a media outlet close to the group.

Referring to Abdullah Ocalan, who has been imprisoned by Turkiye since 1999, the group said: "We declare a ceasefire effective today to pave the way for the implementation of Leader Apo's Call for Peace and Democratic Society. None of our forces will take armed action unless attacked."

PHOTO: X

The conflict between Turkiye and the PKK has led to tens of thousands of deaths since it began in 1984. On Thursday, a delegation of Kurdish politicians announced Ocalan's call for the PKK to lay down its arms and disband after visiting him on his island prison earlier the same day. The ceasefire is the first sign of a break in the conflict since peace talks broke down in the summer of 2015. In its statement, the PKK said Ocalan's statement indicated that a "new historical process has begun in Kurdistan and the Middle East". Kurdistan refers to the parts of Turkiye, Iraq, Syria and Iran inhabited by Kurds. While stating that it would "comply with and implement the requirements of the call from our own side," PKK emphasised that "democratic politics and legal grounds must also be suitable for success". *—PTI*

CLIMATE FURY

Three dead as Cyclone Garance wrecks France's La Reunion

REUNION ISLAND, 1 MARCH

At least three people have been killed as Cyclone Garance struck the French overseas territory of La Reunion Island, bringing wind speeds of up to 155m/h, French police said.

The cyclone which struck on Friday, made landfall in the north of the Indian Ocean Island east of Madagascar, blowing away roofs and cutting power and access to drinking water for many residents.

The storm alert was downgraded from the highest level, purple, to red, earlier in the day on Friday, which allowed rescue workers to leave their shelters and start to assess damage and help those affected. A mandatory order for residents to stay indoors remained in place. After wind speeds dropped, heavy rains were seen as a bigger risk.

A mandatory order to stay indoors remained in place **PHOTO: X**

"The cyclone is still a threat for the island, I call on all to follow local authorities' instructions," French Prime Minister Francois Bayrou said on X on Friday. *—Agencies*

Wildfire in Japan's Iwate forces thousands to evacuate, kills 1

TOKYO, 1 MARCH

A wildfire in the northern Japanese prefecture of Iwate has forced the evacuation of more than a thousand people and killed at least one, with some 2,500 firefighters from around the country battling the blaze on Saturday, backed by 17 helicopters.

The fire is estimated to have spread across some 3,000 acres in the forest of Ofunato, the largest area to have been burnt out since a 1992 wildfire in Kushiro, Hokkaido, a Fire and Disaster Management Agency spokesman told the AFP news agency.

Authorities in the municipality of Ofunato, some 500km from the capital, Toyko, were reported to have told some 4,600 people to seek safe shelter elsewhere since the fire broke out on Wednesday.

More than 80 buildings damaged in the fire **PHOTO: X**

As of Friday, more than 1,000 nearby residents were evacuated and more than 80 buildings damaged, the municipality said.

The blaze has caused power outages to more than 700 households in Ofunato and the neighboring village of Sanriku. *—DW News*

Tuhin Kanta assumes charge as SEBI Chairman

MUMBAI, 1 MAR

Tuhin Kanta Pandey assumed charge as the 11th Chairman of capital markets regulator SEBI on Saturday. Pandey, a career bureaucrat who was serving as the Finance Secretary till now, was appointed chairman of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) by the government on Thursday. He replaces Madhabi Puri Buch, whose three-year tenure ended on Friday. Buch, who is reportedly unwell, was not present when Pandey arrived. Dressed in a dark blue blazer and a striped shirt, Pandey arrived at the SEBI headquarters in the Bandra. —*PTI*

PHOTO:PTI

RBI says 98.18% of Rs 2000 notes returned

MUMBAI, 1 MAR

Reserve Bank on Saturday said 98.18 per cent of the Rs 2000 banknotes have been returned to the banking system, and only Rs 6,471 crore worth such notes are still with the public. On 19 May, 2023, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced the withdrawal of Rs 2000 denomination banknotes from circulation. The total value of Rs 2000 banknotes in circulation, which was Rs 3.56 lakh crore at the close of business, declined to Rs 6,471 crore at the close of business on 28 February, 2025, RBI said. The facility for deposit and/or exchange of the Rs 2000 banknotes was available at all bank branches till 7 October, 2023. However, this facility is still available at the 19 issue offices of the Reserve Bank. Further, members of the public can also send Rs 2000 banknotes through India Post from any post office within the country to any of the RBI issue offices for credit to their bank accounts. —*PTI*

Andhra's Araku Coffee gets organic tag, attracts Tata

VISAKHAPATNAM, 1 MAR

Andhra Pradesh's Girijan Cooperative Corporation Ltd (GCC) has achieved a significant milestone with its organic certification for Araku coffee, enabling it to enter several European markets and secure a major domestic buyer in Tata Consumer Products, who will handle the marketing and sale of the coffee. GCC and Tata Consumer Products have inked an agreement to market and sell certified Araku Coffee, an organic product grown by tribals in the Paderu Agency area. In a major step towards sustainable agriculture, GCC has successfully launched a pilot project for organic certification of coffee in the Paderu Agency area. As part of the deal with organic pepper, the first supply consignment to Tata Consumer Products is scheduled in April. —*PTI*

Private equity firm Haveli Investments acquires AppViewX

CHENNAI, 1 MAR

US-based private equity firm Haveli Investments has acquired certificate lifecycle management and public key infrastructure company AppViewX for an undisclosed sum, the company said on Saturday. The move underscores Haveli's confidence in AppViewX's market leadership and its commitment to leveraging India's world-class technology talent to accelerate growth and innovation. Haveli Investments expects India as a key driver for the future growth of AppViewX, reinforcing its commitment to invest in the region's deep technical expertise and innovation ecosystem. As part of the strategic acquisition, cybersecurity veteran Dino DiMarino has been appointed as the Chief Executive Officer to lead AppViewX in to next phase of growth, a company statement here said. —*PTI*

Commercial LPG gas cylinder price hiked by Rs 6

The prices of domestic LPG cylinders remain unchanged

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Oil marketing companies have increased the prices of commercial LPG cylinders across cities in India. The price of a 19-kg commercial cylinder in Delhi has now risen from Rs 1,797 to Rs 1,803, marking a hike of Rs 6 per cylinder. However, the rates for 14.2-kg domestic LPG cylinders remain unchanged since August 2024.

With effect from 1 March, 2025, the retail price of a 19-kg commercial LPG cylinder has been revised. In Delhi, the price has increased to Rs 1,803 from Rs 1,797. In Mumbai, the cost has gone up to Rs 1,755 from Rs 1,749.50. Kolkata now sees a price of Rs 1,913, compared to the previous Rs 1,907. In Chennai, the price has risen to Rs 1,965 from Rs 1,959.50.

In February, oil marketing companies had reduced the price of a 19-kg commercial LPG cylinder by Rs 7.

The prices of domestic LPG cylinders remain unchanged. In Delhi, a 14.2-kg domestic LPG cylinder continues to cost Rs 803. In Mumbai, the price remains at Rs 802.50, while in Kolkata, it stands at Rs 829. Chennai households will continue to pay Rs 818.50, and in Lucknow, the price remains at Rs 840.50.

Rates for 14.2-kg domestic LPG remain unchanged since 2024 PHOTO: X

- Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) prices have been reduced by 0.23 per cent. The cost in Delhi has dropped by Rs 222 per kilolitre to Rs 95,311.72, down from Rs 95,533.72

Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) prices have been reduced by 0.23 per cent. The cost in Delhi has dropped by Rs 222 per kilolitre to Rs 95,311.72, down from Rs 95,533.72 in February. This follows a 5.6 per cent hike in the previous revision on 1 February. —*Agencies*

DESPITE 1.8% MKTS FALL

FPIs sell ₹34,574 cr equities in Feb, outflow at Rs 1.12L cr

MUMBAI, 1 MAR

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) continued to pull out funds from the Indian stock market in February, selling equities worth Rs 34,574 crore, according to data from the National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL).

The trend of selling remained strong throughout the week from 24 to 28 February, during which FPIs offloaded equities worth Rs 10,905 crore.

However, on Friday, foreign investors turned net buyers, investing Rs 1,119 crore. Despite this, Indian stock markets witnessed a sharp decline on Friday, with both the Nifty and Sensex falling by over 1.8 per cent.

So far in 2025, foreign investors have sold a total of Rs 1,12,601 crore worth of equities, indicating a persistent outflow of funds.

The strengthening of the US dollar and concerns over India's economic outlook have dampened investor sentiment, leading to continued selling pressure in the markets.

The ongoing FPI outflows have impacted market stability, contributing to volatility in Indian equities.

In January the FPIs withdrew Rs 78,027 crore from the Indian stock market. Last year in December the net investment by FPIs in Indian equities stood positive, with a net investment of Rs 15,446 crore.

Additionally, outflows from emerging markets, including India, have been rising as investors shift towards safer assets. —*ANI*

Goyal to visit Washington on Monday for trade talks

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal will visit Washington next week as India, and the US are planning to negotiate a bilateral trade agreement, an official said.

The visit will start from 3 March and the minister is expected to be in the US till Friday, the official added.

During the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington, India and the US announced their commitment to more than double the two-way commerce to USD 500 billion by 2030 and negotiate the first tranche of a mutually beneficial, multi-sector Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) by fall of 2025.

Goyal is likely to hold talks with US Trade Representative (USTR) Jamieson Greer and US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick during the visit.

Piyush Goyal PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

The commerce ministry has already started engagements with different departments on the India-US trade aspects and related developments.

The proposed agreement is an opportunity to boost bilateral trade and investments between the two countries amid threat of US President Donald Trump to impose higher tariffs on Indian goods.

During the first term of US President Donald Trump, the two countries had discussed a mini-trade deal, but it was shelved by the Joe Biden administration as they were not in favour of such pacts.

In 2023-24, the US was the largest trading partner of India with USD 119.71 billion bilateral trade in goods (USD 77.51 billion worth of exports, USD 42.19 billion of imports, with USD 35.31 billion trade surplus).

India has received USD 67.8 billion in foreign direct investments from America during April 2000 and September 2024. —*PTI*

FM urges civil officers to simplify govt accounts

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday asked civil accounts services officials to work towards making the government's annual accounts more approachable and user-friendly.

Addressing the 49th Civil Accounts Day event here, Sitharaman lauded the Indian Civil Accounts Service (ICAS) officers, led by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA) for the "silent technological revolution" in which states are finding a lot more ease of operation and ease of getting their government business done by adopting the public financial management system (PFMS).

"I would also like you to examine, in consultation with the CAG, whether it would be possible to make the annual accounts more approachable and user-friendly and allow citizens to analyse easily and generate customisable and simpler reports," Sitharaman said.

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Sitharaman also asked both the Expenditure Department and the CGA to ensure that the SNA Sparsh is smoothly rolled out for all schemes in the upcoming financial year.

Sitharaman also nudged the Civil Accounts Officers to create more public awareness so that people appreciate that the taxpayers' money is being utilised efficiently. —*PTI*

PM calls on agri-stakeholders for budget ideas

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday urged stakeholders to suggest ways to make ongoing schemes more effective and implement this year's budget in a speedy manner on the ground level.

Addressing virtually the post-budget webinar on "Agriculture and rural prosperity", Modi said the government has presented a full budget in the third term, ensuring consistency in policy and reflecting the vision of Viksit Bharat.

Modi said before the budget, inputs and suggestions from all stakeholders helped in framing it.

He urged the stakeholders to discuss how the ongoing schemes can be made more effective. —*PTI*

AI will drive double-digit growth: Akash

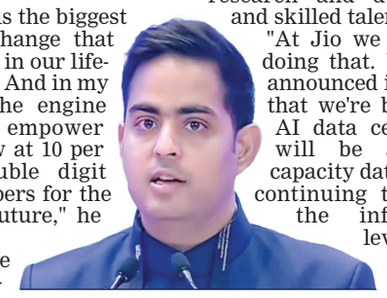
MUMBAI, 1 MAR

Akash Ambani, Chairman of Reliance Jio Infocomm Limited (RJIL), has called artificial intelligence (AI) the biggest technology change of this generation.

Speaking at Mumbai Tech Week 2025 at the Jio World Centre on Friday, he said AI will be the key driver of India's economic growth, helping the country achieve a 10 per cent or double-digit growth rate in the coming years.

During a fireside chat with Dream11 CEO Harsh Jain, Ambani stressed the importance of AI in shaping the future.

"I think AI is the biggest technology change that we have seen in our lifetime till date. And in my view it is the engine that will empower India to grow at 10 per cent or double digit growth numbers for the foreseeable future," he said.



To make India a leader in AI, Ambani highlighted three fundamental areas of focus: AI infrastructure, research and development, and skilled talent.

"At Jio we are already doing that. We recently announced in Jamnagar that we're building our AI data center which will be a gigawatt capacity data center but continuing to invest at the infrastructure level," he said.

The third crucial aspect, according to Ambani, is talent. He stressed the importance of attracting top AI professionals and fostering new ideas. —*ANI*

- Speaking at Mumbai Tech Week 2025 at the Jio World Centre on Friday, he said AI will be the key driver of India's economic growth, helping the country achieve a 10 per cent growth

CAR SALES SHIFT

Toyota, Mahindra up; Hyundai slips

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Maruti Suzuki India on Saturday reported a marginal year-on-year increase in total sales at 1,99,400 units in February.

The company sold a total of 1,97,471 units in the same month last year, Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) said in a statement.

Toyota Kirloskar sales up 13%

Toyota Kirloskar Motor on Saturday said its overall sales increase 13 per cent year-on-year to 28,414 units in February.

The company sold 25,220 units in February 2024. Last month, the company dispatched 26,414 units to its dealers in the domestic market.

Mahindra sales rise 15%

Mahindra & Mahindra on Saturday said its total sales increased 15 per cent year-on-year to 83,702 units in February.

The automaker had sold 72,923 units in February last year.

Hyundai sales dip 3%

Hyundai Motor India on Saturday said its total vehicle dispatches declined 3 per cent year-on-year to 58,727 units in February.

The automaker said it dispatched 47,727 units to dealers in the domestic market last month, a drop of 5 per cent as compared with 50,201 units in February 2024.

JSW MG Motor India retail sales up 16.3%

JSW MG Motor India on Saturday reported a 16.3 per cent rise in retail sales at 4,956 units in February.

Wholesales last month stood at 4,002 units, down from 4,595 units in February 2004, impacted by temporary reduction in production at the company's Halol facility. —*PTI*

Google builds AI-powered agri stack

MUMBAI, 1 MAR

Global tech giant Google is building a digital agri-stack using satellite imagery and has started with a base layer that will help identify farm boundaries, a senior official said on Saturday.

Data and analysis of this base layer of the stack can be used in a slew of applications like bettering the subsidy payments, farm insurance or farm loans, Manish Gupta, a senior director at Google DeepMind said.

".. we have built the first such model that using satellite imagery analysis can now start to identify field boundaries based on usage pattern start to identify what crops are being grown and so on," Gupta said, speaking at the Mumbai Tech Week here.

The model has taken inspiration from UIDAI's Aadhar, ascribing a unique ID to each farm and is intended to act as a base layer of the "digital agri stack", he said.

Gupta said it is upon the startups and other agri-tech players to build solutions which will provide loan crop insurance and also subsidies using the data churned out by the platform.

Meanwhile, Gupta also rued that the amount of content available in Indian languages is very limited and Google is trying address the same with its initiatives. —*PTI*

- Data and analysis of this base layer of the stack can be used in a slew of applications like bettering the subsidy payment

PHOTO: FREEPIK

GST collections rise 9.1% to Rs 1.84 lakh cr in Feb

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Gross GST collections rose by 9.1 per cent to about Rs 1.84 lakh crore in February, official data showed on Saturday.

Gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue includes a 10.2 per cent jump in domestic revenues at Rs 1.42 lakh crore and 5.4 per cent rise in revenues from imports to Rs 41,702 crore during February.

As per the data, during the month, mop up from Central GST stood at Rs 35,204 crore, State GST at Rs 43,704 crore, Integrated GST at Rs 90,870 crore and compensation cess of Rs 13,868 crore.

Total refunds issued during February were Rs 20,889 crore, a 17.3 per cent increase over the year-ago period. Net GST collections during February 2025 grew 8.1 per cent to about Rs 1.63 lakh crore.

Gross and net GST revenues in February 2024 were Rs 1.68 lakh crore and Rs 1.50 lakh crore, respectively. —*PTI*

REPORT FLAGS

India's household savings fall, FDI slows

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

India's savings rate, while not alarming, is not as strong as it should be, especially considering the country's low foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, according to a report by Blume Research.

The report stated that a closer look at savings trends reveals that the biggest concern lies in household financial savings, which have been declining sharply due to a surge in financial liabilities, primarily unsecured personal loans.

It said, "A high savings rate is necessary given low FDI rates. A deep dive into savings illustrates that the culprit is financial savings (as opposed to physical savings), and the reason is rise in financial liabilities, chiefly led by rising (unsecured) personal loans".

PHOTO: FREEPIK

The report highlighted that while India's overall savings rate appears stable, household savings-the largest contributor-have been falling over the years.

The data in the report pointed out that in FY00 (Year 2000), household savings accounted for 84 per cent of the total savings in the economy, but this share has now dropped to just 61 per cent in FY23.

A significant portion of household debt is now non-housing debt, which is higher in India compared to many other economies.

One of the key reasons behind this growing indebtedness is the rise of Small Ticket Personal Loans (STPL), which are mostly unsecured and easy to obtain.

The report noted that non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), including fintech firms, have become the primary source of these loans, often disbursing them digitally. The findings raise concerns about the sustainability of India's savings and debt levels. With a higher proportion of income going toward repaying loans, household savings could continue to shrink, potentially affecting long-term economic stability. —*ANI*

Afghanistan could win an ICC tournament: Steyn

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

South Africa pace legend Dale Steyn reckons the fast-rising Afghanistan can go on to win an ICC limited-overs tournament in the next decade if their players learn how to play patiently. Overcoming war and instability in their nation, the Afghanistan cricket team has evolved from an affiliate member to a formidable force in white-ball tournaments. They almost reached the knockouts in the 2023 ODI World Cup, defeating former champions England, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan, while they were the semifinalists at last year's T20 World Cup, where they knocked out Australia. "We live in a time now where people are not patient enough. We can hardly watch two seconds on an Instagram story, and it just feels like the Afghanistan players are similar when they're playing their cricket," Steyn said on ESPNCricinfo.—*PTI*

Lydia Ko takes third-round lead at LPGA Singapore

SINGAPORE, 1 MAR

Lydia Ko shot a 4-under 68 Saturday to move from one stroke behind to one stroke in front after three rounds of the LPGA's HSBC Women's World Championship.The 27-year-old South Korean-born New Zealander had a 54-hole total of 10-under 206 on the Tanjong course at Sentosa Golf Club.Charley Hull, who birdied two of her first four holes, was a stroke behind in second after a 68. Jeeno Thitikul, who had four back-nine birdies for a 66, had the best round of the day to move into third place, three strokes behind Ko.A Lim Kim, who led after the first two rounds, moved in the wrong direction with a 73 and was tied for fourth place, four strokes off the lead. Defending champion Hannah Green had a 67 to move 16 places up the leaderboard—*PTI*

Rassie and Klaasen help SA eliminate Afghanistan

Proteas qualifies for SFs after bowling out England for 179

NAGPUR, 1 MAR

South Africa cruised into the Champions Trophy semifinals in dominant fashion, defeating England by seven wickets to top Group B here on Saturday.

Opting to bat, England was bundled out for 179 in 38.2 overs as South Africa's bowlers delivered a disciplined performance.

With the modest target ensuring their semifinal berth by the innings break, the Proteas comfortably chased it down in 29.1 overs to finish with five points, two ahead of Australia.

They will now face the Group A runners-up in the semifinals, with India and New Zealand set to battle for Group A placings in Dubai on Sunday.Rassie van der Dussen anchored the chase with a composed 72 not out off 86 balls (6x4, 3x6), while Heinrich Klaasen, returning from injury, smashed a fluent 64 off 56 balls (11x4) in a 127 run stand.

South Africa and **Australia** on Saturday qualified for the Champions Trophy semifinals after the Proteas bowled out a struggling England for 179, the lowest total of the tournament, in their final Group B match here. Already eliminated from the semifinal race, England needed a victory by at least 207 runs to give Afghanistan a chance of qualifying based on the run-rate.

Rassie van der Dussen *PHOTO: PTI*

However, Marco Jansen (3/39) stole the show with the new ball, taking three crucial wickets, and Wiaan Mulder (3/25) and Keshav Maharaj (2/35) applied the pressure in the middle overs as South Africa confirmed their knockout berth, irrespective of the match's result.

PCB announces full refund for two rain-cancelled CT matches

The Pakistan Cricket Board on Saturday announced full ticket refunds for the two Champions Trophy matches in Rawalpindi that were washed out by rain.

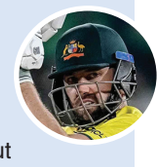
The affected matches, Australia vs South Africa on February 25 and Bangladesh vs Pakistan on 27 February, were abandoned without a ball bowled.

Ticket holders of hospitality tickets (boxes and PCB gallery) will not be eligible for a refund, it said.

Eligible ticket holders can claim their refund at select TCS outlets between 10 March and 14 March.

Brief Scores: England 179; 38.3 overs (Joe Root 37; Marco Jansen 3/39, Wiaan Mulder 3/25, Keshav Maharaj 2/35) lost to South Africa 181/3; 29.1 overs (Rassie van der Dussen 72, Heinrich Klaasen 64) by seven wickets. —*PTI*

Short likely to miss semifinal



Australian opener Matthew Short will likely miss the Champions Trophy semifinal against either India or New Zealand after the in-form batter suffered a quad injury in the washed-out match against Afghanistan here.Short had scored a 15-ball 20 on Friday but had looked in visible pain before he was dismissed by Azmatullah Omarzai as Australia advanced to the semifinals with four points.The 29-year-old white-ball player had scored 63 as Steve Smith's Australia had chased down England's mammoth 351 in their opening match of the Champions Trophy.

Virat Kohli bats in the nets during a practice session ahead of a One Day International (ODI) cricket match of the ICC Champions Trophy between India and New Zealand *PHOTO: PTI*

India look to sharpen spin play

DUBAI, 1 MAR

A seemingly invincible India will be eager to sharpen their game against spin and give a run to second-line players ahead of the semifinal when they take on New Zealand in their last group match of the Champions Trophy here on Sunday.

A win in their last league match will help India top Group A. But that position of pride is of little value because they are set to face either Australia or, most likely, South Africa in the last four, and both of them have handy spin units at their disposal. But they will come up against more wily customers in Mitchell Santner and Michael Bracewell on Sunday, and it could be their harshest test against spin yet in this event. Both the Kiwi spinners are in fine fettle here and could be even more effective on the worn-out surface at Dubai. Indian batters have been clever enough to milk spinners for singles and twos while reserving the big shots against pacers when the ball came much more quickly and predictably at them.

CT POINTS TABLE

GROUP A	M	W	L	PT
1. NZ	2	2	0	4
2. IND	2	2	0	4
3. BAN	3	0	2	1
4. PAK	3	0	2	1
GROUP B	**M**	**W**	**L**	**PT**
1. SA	3	2	0	5
2. AUS	3	1	0	4
3. AFG	3	0	1	3
4. ENG	3	0	3	0

Arshdeep may replace Shami

The presence of five left-handed batters in the New Zealand line-up and the slight calf trouble faced by Mohammed Shami during the Pakistan game may force the Indian team management to play left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh in the Sunday's Champions Trophy game. —*PTI*

RANJI TROPHY FINAL 2025

Karun Nair's 100 puts Vidarbha on top

NAGPUR, 1 MAR

Karun Nair made the most of a reprieve to pile up an unbeaten 132 and power Vidarbha to a position of command with an overall lead of 286 runs at stumps on Day Four of their Ranji Trophy final here on Saturday.

Nair's fourth century of the Ranji Trophy season and ninth overall, including the five tons in the Vijay Hazare Trophy gave Vidarbha the bragging rights and also put one hand on the Ranji Trophy with a third title win in the horizon.

Vidarbha now have the summit clash of the 90th Ranji Trophy completely in their control after Nair's 280-ball 132 not out.

Danish Malewar also shone for the hosts Vidarbha at the VCA Stadium in Jamtha with the right-handed batter following up his first-innings 153 with another resolute knock of 73.

But the biggest moment arrived in the 19th over when Kerala's Akshay Chandran spilled a regulation grab at the first slip off Eden Apple Tom when Nair was on 31.

However, it wasn't all smooth sailing for Vidarbha, who began the day with a 37-run lead in the second innings.

Veteran spinner Jalaj Saxena (1/76) struck as early as in the second over to clean up Parth Rekhade, while Mohammed Azharuddeen's brilliance got Kerala the second breakthrough in the third.

Azharuddeen flung to his right and collected the catch in front of the first slip, which left Vidarbha in a spot of bother at 7/2 with an overall lead of 44.

Yash Rathod (24) put on a further 49 runs for the fourth wicket with Nair but was pinned in front of the wickets by Aditya Sarwate (1/55).

Brief Scores: Vidarbha 379 & 249/4 in 90 overs (Danish Malewar 73, Karun Nair 132 not out; Akshay Chandran 1/29) lead Kerala 342 by 286 runs. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

FIFA President Gianni Defends Saudi World Cup

DUBAI, 1 MAR

FIFA president Gianni Infantino on Friday stood by his governing body's decision to award the 2034 World Cup to Saudi Arabia while also defending his relationship with Donald Trump. The Gulf kingdom was controversially handed the right to host the World Cup at a FIFA Congress in December despite concerns about its human rights record, the risks to migrant labourers, and the criminalisation of same-sex relationships. The process followed by FIFA was also criticised by the Norwegian Football Federation, but speaking in Belfast on Friday, Infantino said: "There was a Congress decision, uniting the entire world.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Duplantis raises his pole vault world record to 6.27m

CLERMONT, 1 MAR

Mondo Duplantis lifted his pole vault world record to 6.27 meters in a World Athletics Indoor Tour meeting. The Olympic and world champion added a centimeter to his world record he last improved in August in Poland. It was the 11th world pole vault record for Duplantis. The Swede did it on his first attempt at the All-Star Perche. Emmanouil Karalis was second with a Greek record clearance of 6.02. Six men cleared 5.91 or higher for the first time in a single competition. —*PTI*

Top players picked for home Billie Jean King Cup

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

There were no surprises in the Indian team picked for the upcoming Billie Jean King Cup, with the AITA selection committee going for tried and tested top-ranked players, led by number one Ankita Raina, while Vishal Uppal returned as captain of the side after two years.

Raina will have Sahaja Yamalapalli, Shrivalli Bhamidipaty, and Vaidehi Chaudhari in the side, while Prarthana Thombare will be the doubles specialist in the five-member squad.

Teen sensation Maaya Rajeshwaran, who recently made the semifinals of the WTA Mumbai Open, will be the reserve player on the side. India will host the Bille Jean King Cup at Deccan Gymkhana in Pune from 8 April.

A training camp will begin at the venue on 2 April, and Rutuja Bhosale and Vaishnavi Adkar have also been invited to be part of the preparations. In March 2023, Uppal was removed as non-playing captain, with Shalini Thakur replacing him. —*PTI*

Yuki wins doubles title at Dubai

Yuki Bhambri and Alexei Popyrin came back from the brink of defeat to win the doubles title at the Dubai Tennis Championships, an ATP 500 event, on Saturday. The Indo-Australian pair of Bhambri and Popyrin saved four championship points during the second set to beat reigning Australian Open champion and second-seeded Finnish-British pair of Harri Heliovaara and Henry Patten 3-6, 7-6(12), [10-8] in the summit clash. It is the fourth title on the ATP Tour for the Indian and so far, his biggest one.

Neeraj urges all to cycle on Sundays

NEW DELHI, 1 MAR

Two-time Olympic medallist Neeraj Chopra on Saturday pledged support to the government's 'FIT India Sundays on Cycle' event, saying that the initiative would not only help people improve their fitness but also contribute towards controlling pollution.

The javelin superstar urged the people to take out time every Sunday and join the initiative. "Namaste Fit India Sundays on Cycle is a fantastic way to improve one's fitness and to contribute towards controlling pollution. So, I would like to tell you that please indulge in cycling every Sunday. —*PTI*

INDIAN SUPER LEAGUE

MC holds MB SG to a 2-2 draw

MUMBAI, 1 MAR

Mumbai City FC drew 2-2 against Mohun Bagan Super Giant at the Mumbai Football Arena in the Indian Super League (ISL) 2024-25, here on Saturday.

The Islanders moved to 33 points from 22 games and are now just one point away from qualifying for the playoffs.

There was a spate of chances created in the opening half-hour by the Mariners, with players like Jamie Maclaren and Deepak Tangri taking the onus in the final third to discover openings past the Mumbai City FC defense.

The Islanders whisked past a couple of close calls before Maclaren provided another testament to his finishing instinct with a powerful finish into the bottom left corner from the centre of the box in the 32nd minute. Mumbai City FC arguably missed the composed presence of Mehtab Singh at the heart of the backline as Dimitrios Petratos made it pay for the lack of organisation with a stunning strike from inside the 18-yard area to double the lead nine minutes later. The hosts regained their footing after the break when Fernandes's corner kick. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X/@MUMBAICITYFC

Prague Masters: Praggu scores first win

PRAGUE, 1 MAR

Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa cruised to a smooth victory against Nguyen Thai Dai Van of the Czech Republic, while Aravindh Chithambaram emerged as the sole leader, defeating top seed Wei Yi of China in the third round of the Prague Masters here.It was a swift and commanding victory for Praggnanandhaa, widely regarded as the biggest favourite to win this tournament.It was a Nimzo-Indian defense, and in Praggnanandhaa's words, it was "just a position to play". The middle game surfaced with Dai Van being on the defensive despite his extra pawn, a typical feature of the structure, and the Indian navigated the complexities with ease.

PHOTO: X

Gukesh attains career-best No 3 ranking

India's reigning world champion D Gukesh climbed to a career-high number three ranking, while compatriot R Praggnanandhaa broke back into the top 10 in the latest FIDE classical ratings released on Saturday. The 18-year-old Gukesh, who has been in sublime form ever since he beat China's Ding Liren to clinch the world title in Singapore in December, has gained 10 points and now has a 2787 rating. —*PTI*

SENSATIONAL FORM

Mika Biereth scores 3rd hat trick this month

MONACO, 1 MAR

Mika Biereth continued his sensational form for AS Monaco, scoring a hat-trick in a 3-0 victory over Stade de Reims at the Stade Louis II. The January signing has now scored 10 goals in just seven Ligue 1 appearances, including three consecutive home hat tricks.

Reims, winless in 12 matches and on a four-game losing streak, had recently enjoyed a Coupe de France semi-final berth after penalty shootout victories over Angers SCO and, ironically, Monaco. This cup success seemed to briefly inspire their attack, with Keito Nakamura setting up Junya Ito for an early chance, which was thwarted by a last-ditch Thilo Kehrer challenge.

Mika Biereth

However, it was Biereth who stole the show. After a glancing effort went narrowly wide, he opened the scoring by volleying home Caio Henrique's cross from the right. The Danish striker, who joined from SK Sturm Graz, has quickly become a fan favorite, scoring seven goals in his first three home matches. He could have had a hat trick before half-time.

Biereth added his second shortly after the break, tapping in after Breel Embolo's shot was parried. Reims manager Samba Diawara's half-time substitution, introducing forward Oumar Diakite, failed to alter the course of the match. Biereth completed his hat-trick, once again showcasing his predatory instincts, to cement Monaco's dominance —*PTI*

Aston Villa into FA Cup QFs

Marco Asensio's second-half double sent Aston Villa through to their first FA Cup quarter-final in 10 years after a 2-0 win over Championship strugglers Cardiff. After being frustrated for 68 minutes, the on-loan Paris St. Germain midfielder broke the deadlock from a Marcus Rashford assist before killing the game 10 minutes from time.

Bayern Munich extends Bundesliga lead to 11 points

STUTTGART, 1 MAR

Bayern Munich came from behind to beat Stuttgart 3-1 and extend its lead at the top of the Bundesliga to 11 points.

Bayern's ninth win in its last 10 Bundesliga matches was disappointing news for a chasing pack that hoped to see its lead cut after Stuttgart went ahead in the 34th minute.

The home side started well and had already hit the woodwork when Angelo Stiller gave it the lead. The former Bayern youth player gathered the ball outside the box and rifled a superb strike into the roof of the net from 20 meters.

But Michael Olise equalized on the stroke of halftime when he ran on to Leroy Sané's defense-splitting pass and calmly converted in the one-on-one. Leon Goretzka, back in the side to replace the injured Joshua Kimmich, made it 2-1, and Kingsley Coman scored a fine individual goal in the final minutes.

The result was another blow for Stuttgart, which has taken only four points from its last six league games. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X